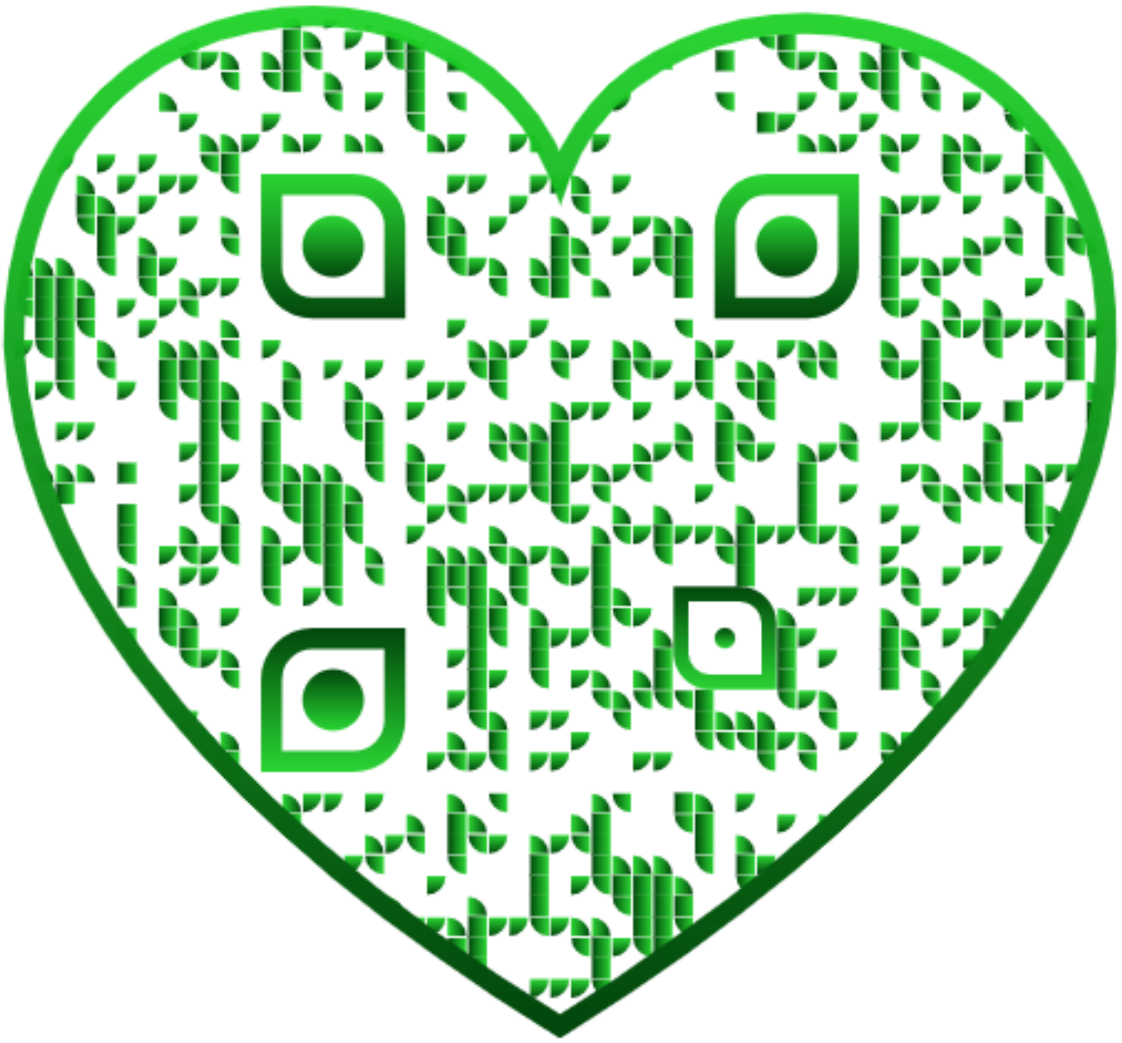
Rolling Stone
JUNE 2022
ISSUE 1364

Blackpink

From Strangers *to* Sisters *to* Pop Supernovas

Clockwise from left, Jisoo, Rosé, Jennie, and Lisa



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Contents

The Future of Music

TOMORROW'S MOST EXCITING MUSIC TODAY

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Daniel Dorsa**

STYLING BY MARISSA PELLY. TOP AND BOTTOM BY ANGEL CHEN. SHOES BY DR. MARTENS. JEWELRY BY BERNARD JAMES.

ISSUE 1364
'ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS'

"Oftentimes I'm the only person in the room that looks like me."
BARTEES STRANGE

FEATURING

54 The Giant Dreams of Bartees Strange
He's become one of the buzziest acts in music in just two years by doing things his way.
By Jon Blistein

58 Are Concerts Safe?
The live-music industry gears up for its biggest season in years.
By Ethan Millman

60 Truth and Dare
Tokischa is the most provocative superstar in Dominican dembow.
By Julyssa Lopez

63 ABBA 2.0
Inside the Swedish pop icons' groundbreaking, tech-assisted London residency.
By Brittany Spanos

64 Omar Apollo Frees Himself
Making his debut LP, the Mexican American Gen Z heartthrob learned to be true to himself.
By Tomás Mier

68 Brooklyn on Fire
New York's drill scene keeps growing, even as critics blame the music for violence.
By Will Dukes

Contents

32

Features

44 **Blackpink**
How the Korean girl group went from strangers to sisters to pop supernovas.
BY HAERYUN KANG

The Mix

11 **Afrobeats' Humble Hero**
A thoughtful interview with Fireboy DML, one of Nigerian pop's new kings.
BY NELSON C.J.

15 **Record Shop Nostalgia Trip**
A new book recalls the days when record stores had personalities.
BY DAVID BROWNE

18 **Pop Punk's Long, Weird Legacy**
Thanks to Olivia and Willow, the genre is back from oblivion and all grown-up.
BY ROB SHEFFIELD

Departments

Opening Act 8
RS Recommends 16
The Last Word 82

22 **Jerrod Carmichael Is Finished Hiding**
How the *Rothaniel* comedian transcended the form and changed his life.
BY DAN HYMAN

Q&A
32 **Soccer Mommy**
On her great new album and why fame's not so hot.
BY ANGIE MARTOCCIO

National Affairs

34 **MAGA Law: How the Trump Judges Twist U.S. Justice**
They're overwhelmingly young, white, male, and extreme. And they'll be in power for a generation
BY JAY MICHAELSON

RS Reports

38 **The Satantist Neo-Nazi Plot to Murder U.S. Soldiers**
A rogue G.I.'s trial exposes the depths of a murderous far-right ideology.
BY ALI WINSTON

Reviews

Music

71 **Harry Throws a House Party**
Harry Styles delivers sleek pop pleasures on third LP.
BY JON DOLAN

Movies

76 **The Need for Speed (and Sequels)**
Tom Cruise's *Top Gun* flyboy-in-winter doesn't quite take our breath away.
BY K. AUSTIN COLLINS

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ROLLING STONE (ISSN 0035-791x) is published 12 times per year, which is subject to change at any time, by Penske Business Media, LLC, 475 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to ROLLING STONE Customer Service, P.O. Box 37505, Boone, IA 50037-0505. Canadian Postmaster: Send address changes and returns to P.O. Box 63, Malton CFC, Mississauga, Ontario L4T3B5. Canada Poste publication agreement #40683192. International Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 450553.

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Opening Act

Jhayco's Jewels

"DA-KI-TI! DA-KI-TI!" Jhayco had left the stage, but the fans at New York's Terminal 5 wanted more — so of course the Puerto Rican rapper and producer formerly known as Jhay Cortez obliged, bounding back out to perform "Dákiti," his 2020 blockbuster recorded with Bad Bunny. It was one highlight among many in an energetic set that showcased Jhayco's flair for cool, clubby production ("En Mi Cuarto") as much as his easy charm as a lead performer. As fans shouted the words to each verse till they echoed off the club's walls, it was clear he's a fast-rising star on his way to even bigger things. **SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON**

Jhayco finalizes his flashy look backstage at Terminal 5 in May.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **OK McCausland** | **9**

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The Mix

WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S NEXT, WHAT'S NUTS

Afrobeats' Humble Hero

Fireboy DML is one of the biggest names in Nigerian pop, but he values staying grounded

→

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Adedamola Odetara**

FIREBOY DML

WHEN FIREBOY DML turned 10, his mother baked him a makeshift cake. She cut up some old cardboard to make a one and a zero, then stuck the numerals on top of the cake. It wasn't the grandest of celebrations, but it was heartfelt, and it was all the family could afford at the time. What Fireboy remembers most, though, is how sad the other kids in their neighborhood seemed as they sang "Happy Birthday" to him.

"I saw so much pain and struggle in their eyes, and that gave me clarity," says the Nigerian singer, now 26. "Like, nobody really gives a fuck. Someone [could] say, 'It's someone's birthday, let us go and celebrate' – but it doesn't mean they're not feeling pain, it doesn't mean they're not miserable, it doesn't mean they're not frustrated about something. Ever since that time, something just died inside of me."

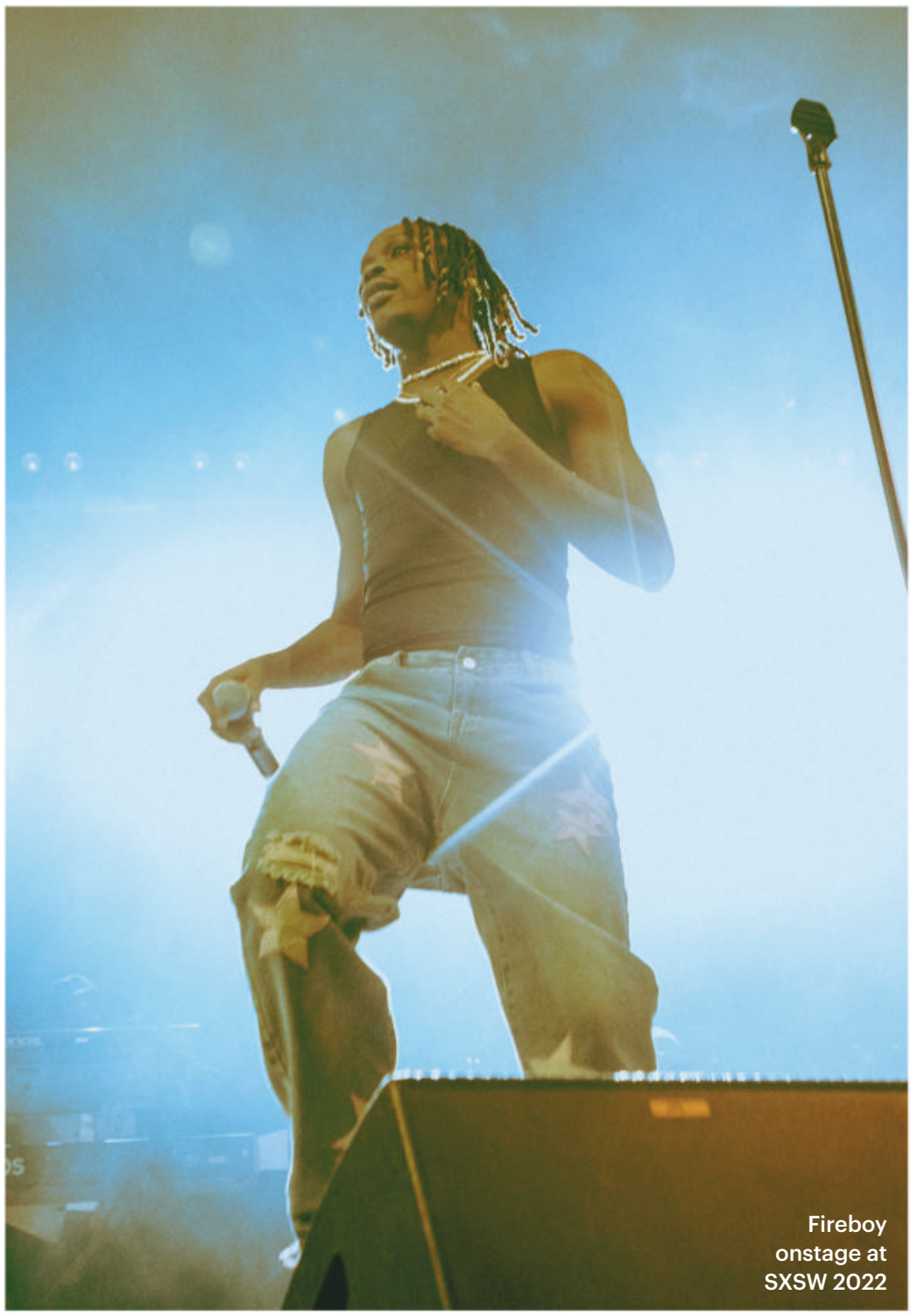
These days, Fireboy is a punctilious, perceptive artist, with a fiercely individualistic range. He has a knack for crafting lyrics suffused with intention and alluring honesty, along with hooks that stay in your head long after the song is over. Those qualities have made him one of the leading voices in Afrobeats and a burgeoning global superstar, getting Ed Sheeran to sing on the remix of his own 2021 hit "Peru" and personally being hand-picked by Madonna to feature on a new club remix of "Frozen."

At 4 p.m. in Lagos, Fireboy sits in a plush high-backed chair at the Oriental Hotel, whose luxurious decor mirrors the cosmopolitan taste of well-to-do Nigerians. Halfway behind silk caramel curtains, a large window shows a heart-stopping view of the Lagos lagoon, now turned a gentle gray from pollution and dotted with boats and bridges leading to the island where the hotel is located.

Decked out in a lime-green ensemble of baggy cargo pants, a soft cotton sweater vest, and a furry bucket hat covering most of his dreadlocks, he seems immensely relaxed – unbothered about taking himself too seriously, yet distinct in his thought process. When he talks, he peppers his sentences with Yoruba, his birth language, and pidgin, lightening the mood and making himself come across as human as possible.

Staying rooted in his sense of humanity matters very much to Fireboy. "I've always been reclusive, placing priority on solitude, having alone time, and I've never really been the going-out person," he says. "Growing as a person and into the industry, seeing things, I realized how important it is to hold on to that part of me that always seeks solitude after a long period of time of exchanging energy out there."

Earlier this year, Fireboy rounded off his first U.S. tour, an experience he describes as the highlight of his career. "I had the best performances of my life," he says. The tour, which lasted all of February and saw him perform across 11 states, opened his eyes to the wide-reaching influence of his music and of the Afrobeats genre. "It was during the peak winter period and people were coming out in the snow," he says. "Family men, married people with kids. It meant a whole lot to me. When you live this life and you're blinded by the glamour, it's the little things that burst your head."



Fireboy onstage at SXSW 2022

Born Adedamola Adefolahan, the first of three boys, Fireboy got his big break in 2019, when he rereleased the infectious head-bopper "Jealous." Later that year, he released his debut album, *Laughter, Tears and Goosebumps*; without so much as a feature from an established artist, the LP went on to win several awards and solidify his place in the rising crop of Afrobeats artists. In hindsight, Fireboy considers that move risky, but one that affirmed his need to make music on his own creative terms.

Growing up in Abeokuta, a city in southwestern Nigeria about 50 miles outside Lagos among hills and mountains, Fireboy scarcely shared his life with anyone. "Apart from my family, all the memories I have of that time were with me in solitude," he says. He had few friends, and it wasn't until he left for university that his world began to open up. Although he grew up with academic parents who, like many other Nigerian parents, hoped he would follow their path toward a solid white-collar career, he was drawn to music instead.

He'd been part of a church choir in Abeokuta, and when he began studying English at the Obafemi Awolowo University, his interest in music heightened. He remembers begging for performance slots at events before finding an early foothold in the industry by working as a songwriter; while he regrets selling some of the songs he wrote in this era, he cites it as a necessary part of the process. Eventually he was discovered by legendary Nigerian rapper Olamide, who signed Fireboy. "For me, it's always been Fireboy's sound," Olamide says. "It's distinct. It's undeniable. From the first time we met, I knew he would bring something to music that hasn't been heard before."

Since his career took off in 2019, Fireboy has kept up a steady pace, releasing two successful albums. If those releases established him as an artist with serious global ambitions and reflective depths, he says his upcoming LP, *Playboy*, will show his playful and carefree side.

"Like, *omo*, I just want to live my life and stop overthinking stuff," Fireboy says. "I've heard people say online that Fireboy is too serious, and maybe that's the vibe I gave off from the first two albums. But this one is about loosening up. Enjoy your life. There's a vibe to it. It's cohesive as an album should be. I'm excited. I like what I hear when I listen to the album every night."

The songs on *Playboy* paint a picture of a man whose life has opened up in unimaginable ways, and who now stands ready to look into the future without any dread. His approach to love is less yearning and more matter-of-fact, underlined with a brash approach to chasing his desires and showing a newly prominent bad-boy persona. This is Fireboy's first character arc, and he appears fully prepared for it.

For now, Fireboy is taking time to get his album ready for summer while trying to stay grounded. "I am recovering from spending so long out there on the road," he says. "After a very long couple of months of doing that, it's imperative that I stay at home, chill and relax, read a book, or play FIFA – you know, just have a semblance of humanity. I'm learning to appreciate little things, like coming home to my brothers, having them run around the house to disturb me for stuff, things that remind me of who I really am as a person. I hold on to those a lot." NELSON C.J.

FAST FACTS

BY THE BOOK
Fireboy is a big fiction reader, and he's currently enjoying Dean Koontz's suspenseful 1987 bestseller, *Watchers*.

THE VOICE
Pop crooners like Celine Dion and Jon Bellion are among his influences.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN
Fireboy could have ended up in academia: "If I didn't make it in music, I probably would be teaching or studying for some higher degree," he says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY Salihah Saadiq

Welcome to long-acting HIV treatment.

"With every-other-month CABENUVA, I'm good to go."

Jayson
Stays undetectable with CABENUVA
Results may vary.

CABENUVA is the only complete, long-acting injectable prescription used to replace daily HIV pills in certain adults and adolescents who have their doctor's approval.

Every-other-month CABENUVA is given by a healthcare provider as 2 injections, initially 1 month apart for 2 months. **It works continuously to help you stay undetectable* for 2 months.**

Attend all appointments.

Watch Jayson's Story

Ask your doctor about CABENUVA

*Undetectable means the amount of HIV in the blood is below the level that can be measured by a lab test. Results may vary.
Jayson has been compensated by ViiV Healthcare.

Important Facts About CABENUVA

This is only a brief summary of important information about CABENUVA and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and treatment.
(kab' en ue vah)

ABOUT CABENUVA

CABENUVA is a complete prescription regimen used to treat HIV-1 infection in adults and adolescents ≥12 years who weigh at least 77 lbs (35 kg) and are replacing their current HIV-1 treatment when their healthcare provider determines that they meet certain requirements.
HIV-1 is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
CABENUVA contains 2 different medicines:

- cabotegravir
- rilpivirine

It is not known if CABENUVA is safe and effective in children younger than 12 years of age or weighing less than 77 lbs (35 kg).

DO NOT RECEIVE CABENUVA IF YOU

- have ever had an allergic reaction to cabotegravir or rilpivirine.
- are taking the following medicines:
  - carbamazepine
  - oxcarbazepine
  - phenobarbital
  - phenytoin
  - rifabutin
  - rifampin
  - rifapentine
  - dexamethasone (more than a single-dose treatment)
  - St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

BEFORE RECEIVING CABENUVA

Tell your healthcare provider about all your medical conditions, including if you:

- have ever had a skin rash or an allergic reaction to medicines that contain cabotegravir or rilpivirine.
- have ever had liver problems, including hepatitis B or C infection.
- have ever had mental health problems.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if CABENUVA will harm your unborn baby. CABENUVA can remain in your body for up to 12 months or longer after the last injection.

Please see additional Important Facts About CABENUVA on the following page.

CABENUVA
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extended-release injectable suspensions

CABENUVA
cabotegravir 200 mg/mL; rilpivirine 300 mg/mL
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CABENUVA.com

Important Facts About CABENUVA (cont'd)

BEFORE RECEIVING CABENUVA (cont'd)

Tell your healthcare provider about all your medical conditions, including if you: (cont'd)

- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. **Do not breastfeed if you take CABENUVA.**
  - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby. It is not known if CABENUVA can pass to your baby in your breast milk.
  - Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby during treatment with CABENUVA.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Some medicines interact with CABENUVA. Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a list of medicines that interact with CABENUVA.

Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can tell you if it is safe to take CABENUVA with other medicines.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CABENUVA

CABENUVA may cause serious side effects, including:

- **Allergic reactions.** Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a rash with CABENUVA. **Stop receiving CABENUVA and get medical help right away if you develop a rash with any of the following signs or symptoms:**
  - fever
  - generally ill feeling
  - tiredness
  - muscle or joint aches
  - trouble breathing
  - blisters or sores in mouth
  - blisters
  - redness or swelling of the eyes
  - swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue
- **Post-injection reactions** have happened within minutes in some people after receiving their rilpivirine injection. Most symptoms resolved within minutes after the injection. Symptoms may include:
  - trouble breathing
  - narrowing of airways
  - stomach cramps
  - sweating
  - numbness of your mouth
  - pain (e.g., back and chest)
  - feeling anxious
  - feeling warm
  - rash
  - feeling light-headed or feeling like you are going to pass out (faint)
  - blood pressure changes

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[a]Subject to eligibility and program terms and conditions; ViiVConnect programs do not constitute health insurance.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CABENUVA (cont'd)

CABENUVA may cause serious side effects, including: (cont'd)

- **Liver problems.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus or people who have certain liver function test changes may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening changes in certain liver tests during CABENUVA treatment. Liver problems have also happened in people without history of liver problems or other risk factors. Your healthcare provider may do blood tests to check your liver function. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop any of the following signs or symptoms of liver problems:**
  - your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice)
  - dark or "tea-colored" urine
  - light-colored stools (bowel movements)
  - nausea or vomiting
  - loss of appetite
  - pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area
  - itching
- **Depression or mood changes. Call your healthcare provider or get emergency medical help right away if you have any of the following symptoms:**
  - feeling sad or hopeless
  - feeling anxious or restless
  - have thoughts of hurting yourself (suicide) or have tried to hurt yourself

The most common side effects of CABENUVA include:

- pain, tenderness, hardened mass or lump, swelling, redness, itching, bruising, and warmth at the injection site
- fever
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle or bone pain
- nausea
- sleep problems
- dizziness
- rash

These are not all the possible side effects of CABENUVA. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

GET MORE INFORMATION

- Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- Go to CABENUVA.com or call 1-877-844-8872, where you can also get FDA-approved labeling.

March 2022 CBN:4PIL

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CBRADVT220003 March 2022
Produced in USA.

BOOK

What's in the Bag? Good Memories

A-Z of Record Shop Bags Fuel, $34.95

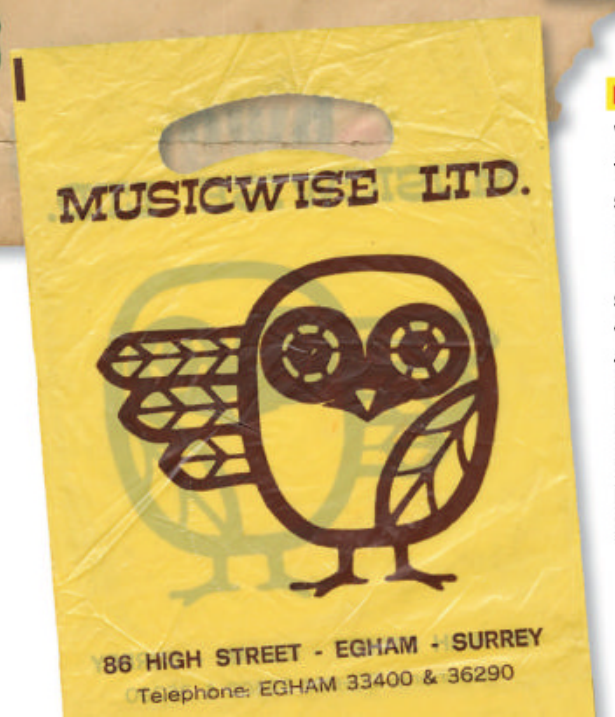
A FEW YEARS AGO, British indie-label owner Jonny Trunk grew nostalgic for his vinyl-shopping days: "You come across records you bought that might still have the stickers on them, but the shop's gone." He began collecting the bags that stores handed out with purchases – ending up with the 560 examples in his new book, *A-Z of Record Shop Bags: 1940s to 1990s,* each one recalling the days when record stores had their own aesthetics and personalities. "The bags conjure up very fond moments," Trunk says. "People see bags from shops where they bought their first record, where they first heard a certain artist, met their girlfriend or boyfriend, first saw their first town punk or a local goth, or first got ripped off buying a reissue, not an original." Now where's a U.S. companion? **DAVID BROWNE**

▼ ONE STOP
Before closing in 1975, this small London chain specialized in hard-to-find discs. Mick Jagger and Jimi Hendrix are both said to have been among the customers of One Stop's distinctive-looking shops.

▲ HMV
This chain offered a chance to immerse oneself in multiple floors of music. "The salon was a place where you could buy high-end pressings," Trunk says. "There were probably two or three sofas in there."

▲ RUSHWORTH'S
This legendary Liverpool shop sold discs as well as musical instruments — including guitars picked out by Paul McCartney, John Lennon, and George Harrison.

▶ MUSICWISE
"I like bags with characters on them," Trunk says of this bag. He also chose this one since, he says, "my dad was called an owl because he wore glasses."



▶ WOOLWORTH
Well into the Eighties, the department-store chain was the U.K.'s leading record retailer — even selling LPs of cover versions of hits, as the bags imply. "They look like pop stars, but probably for legal reasons couldn't look like anyone you knew," says Trunk.

RS RECOMMENDS

OUR TOP POP-CULTURE PICKS OF THE MONTH

BOOK

1. ‘More Real Life Rock’

Greil Marcus is one of America’s most esteemed cultural critics. His latest must-read collection of “Real Life Rock Top 10” columns finds him navigating the Trump years, with brilliant riffs on everything from Sleater-Kinney to *Better Call Saul*.

PODCAST

2. ‘Run, Bambi Run’

Who was Laurie “Bambi” Bembenek — and why couldn’t the public look away from her lurid 1980s murder trial? This new podcast explores the life of the Playboy Club bunny turned Wisconsin cop turned fugitive.

ALBUM

3. ‘The Suffers’ ‘It Starts With Love’

The first LP in four years from the Houston collective led by singer-songwriter Kam Franklin is a thrilling mix of textured R&B, soaring power ballads, and Gulf Coast funk.

TOUR

4. Halsey

Halsey is heading back on the road in the U.S. for the first time in four years (thanks, Covid). This time the tour is in support of her moody, regal, and rock-tinged 2021 album, *If I Can’t Have Love, I Want Power*. She’ll also be bringing a special guest on the road: her one-year-old son, Ender.

SINGLE

5. ‘Sky Ferreira’s “Don’t Forget”

Behold, Sky Ferreira stans! The elusive punky pop star is back. Though we may not know when her long-awaited sophomore LP, *Masochism,* is coming (if it ever does), we at least have “Don’t Forget,” a bold and catchy return to her synth-pop roots.

DOCUMENTARY

6. ‘The Janes’

As we hurdle toward a post-*Roe v. Wade* reality, this HBO doc explores the Jane Collective, a group of Chicago activists who created an underground abortion network before it was legal nationwide.

MEMOIR

7. ‘Dirtbag, Massachusetts’

Isaac Fitzgerald’s memoir-in-essays is a bighearted read infused with candor, sharp humor, and the hope that comes from discovering saints can be found in all sorts of places.

MOVIE

8. ‘Marcel the Shell With Shoes On’

If you’ve seen Jenny Slate’s popular YouTube shorts starring a partially animated shell, you know that this sensitive, inquisitive little fellow contains multitudes. Now Slate and co-creator/director Dean Fleischer-Camp have given Marcel his own movie, in which he faces loneliness, life during lockdown, and his ailing grandmother (voiced by Isabella Rossellini). Bring the tissues.

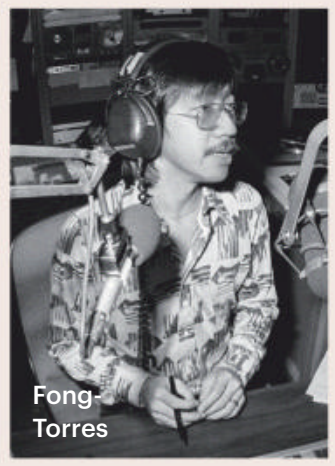
For reviews, premieres, and more, go to RollingStone.com/music

TV SHOW

9. ‘Stranger Things’

Eleven and the gang are almost adults in Season Four, but that’s not stopping the Duffer brothers from sending them on new terrifying adventures in the Upside Down. Why we’re tuning in: Hopper’s not only reportedly alive, but the new season should give us more backstory on how he became such a lovingly grizzled police chief.

A ROCK STAR OF NEW JOURNALISM GETS HIS DUE


Fong-Torres

WHEN ‘ROLLING STONE’ was a rickety operation being run out of a San Francisco loft, and the music business was still so low-key that you could score an interview with Jim Morrison by simply bumping into him, Ben Fong-Torres was there. One of RS’ first star writers, he finally gets his own spotlight in the excellent new documentary *Like a Rolling Stone: The Life & Times of Ben Fong-Torres*, directed by Suzanne Joe Kai. Fong-Torres was a more-than-almost-famous figure in his own right in the Seventies, as he wrote about artists from Ike and Tina Turner to Ray Charles to Bob Dylan and George Harrison (whom he unforgettably took to task for a lackluster tour). In the film, former subjects (Elton John, Carlos Santana) and colleagues (RS founder Jann Wenner, Cameron Crowe) share tales of Fong-Torres as a dogged reporter, sharp editor, and generally mensch-y dude. Fong-Torres’ own story is fascinating: The son of Chinese immigrants, he once found himself the only Asian kid in an all-white school in 1950s Texas after his dad moved there to help start a new restaurant. “Probably more than a few times, musicians, especially those of color, in some way connected to me as a kind of a fellow outsider,” Fong-Torres says. “I think they saw me as a fellow marginalized person, doing something extraordinary — just as they were.” **BRIAN HIATT**

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: HBO; MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES; DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE; SASHA HAAGENSEN/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF FRED MORALES; NETFLIX

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Pop Punk's Long, Weird Legacy

Thanks to Olivia, Willow, and a new generation, the genre is back from oblivion and all grown-up – sort of

"NOBODY LIKES YOU when you're 23," as Blink-182 used to sing on MTV – 23 summers ago. But all these years later, pop punk isn't merely all grown-up. In 2022, pop punk is back from the dead, more popular and influential than ever – suddenly, it's the Teenager of the Year. It's a massive resurgence for the music style that always fetishized the ideal of permanent adolescence, turning a bratty sneer into a way of life. But now, pop punk is downright respectable. How the hell did this happen?

It's beautifully bizarre, since pop punk was never about aiming for cultural significance. The whole artistic goal was encouraging listeners to take off their pants and jacket. But nobody could have predicted this music's weird legacy, whether that means Avril Lavigne making her comeback as the ultimate scene queen, or Travis Barker ascending to the showbiz throne of America's Drummer. Olivia Rodrigo is even covering Avril's "Complicated" on her debut tour – a true passing of the torch.

ROB SHEFFIELD
SOUND AND VISION

Pop punk has evolved into a ubiquitous music language, especially as female audiences and performers have claimed this voice as their own. No other pop noise does a perfect job of snarling the timeless question "Where's my fucking teenage dream?" There's Paramore inspiring a whole generation. Willow teaming up with Travis and Avril to vent her teen angst. Olivia scoring an instant-classic Number One hit with "Good 4 U," a sociopath-bashing rager that could pass for Paramore, X-Ray Spex, the Buzzcocks, Fastbacks, or countless other beloved bands. Scene moms all over America are raiding their closets for this fall's When We Were Young Festival, with a slew of pop-punk and emo legends – a festival that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

GOOD 4 HER
Olivia Rodrigo performing live

Machine Gun Kelly is a whole story in himself, dropping his new guitar-crazed *Mainstream Sellout* and getting engaged to Megan Fox with a thorn-covered ring that causes pain if you try to take it off. (Such a pop-punk thing to do.) People love to argue over whether he's "real" pop punk or not, a debate that would have seemed absurd back in the day – who ever thought this genre would have purists? But the controversy is part of the appeal. "I read a headline that said the age of the rock star is dead," MGK announced at the American Music Awards. "Looks pretty alive to me!"

Pop punk hit a peak of cultural saturation in the early 2000s. When I think of that moment, I'll always think of the night I went to see a Knicks game with Sum 41 – their label boss wasn't using his courtside seats that evening. These spike-haired Canadian dudes didn't exactly fit in with the rest of the crowd, but they raised eyebrows and made people smile everywhere we went. The elderly security guard waved and said, "Hey, what's my age again!" (Wrong band, dude, but you sure get points for trying.)

The story goes all the way back to the Ramones, who helped define punk rock yelling "1-2-3-4!" in the sweaty, druggy CBGB days of the mid-Seventies. But it's important to keep in mind that they were always inspired by bubblegum teen pop in the first place, like the ultimate 1970s boy band, the Bay City Rollers. When the Ramones wrote "Blitzkrieg Bop," their template was the Rollers, who got kids around the world to chant, "S-A-T-U-R! D-A-Y! Night!" The Ramones cheerfully admitted with that "Hey, ho, let's go" they were trying to copy the Rollers – and they sincerely believed they were writing a Number One pop hit. But they saw themselves as a boy band from the git-go. And let the record show that Avril scored her first Number One hit with "Girlfriend," a self-conscious tribute to the Ramones' classic "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend."

When Australia's 5 Seconds of Summer made their huge breakthrough back in 2014, they permanently trashed the boundaries between boy bands and pop punk. They rocked stadiums in their Green Day and Nirvana T-shirts, playing pop-punk guitar riffs under a "Mixtape '94" banner, while on tour opening for One Direction. I chatted with them backstage at a stadium show that summer – we were all sipping chocolate milk. The 5SoS guys laughed hysterically at the idea of "purists," who wanted to argue whether they were "real" or not. "It's fun when you're confusing people," drummer Ashton Irwin told me. "I'll look online and see some 30-year-old dude saying, 'They're not rock! Bullet for My Valentine for life!' But his daughter probably likes our band. And she'll start her own band."

Those words turned out to be prophetic, since a key reason for the revival is that pop punk is a language that pop girls have claimed to express themselves, making the music more diverse and inclusive than ever. Paramore came to define the genre more than anyone, and every time Hayley Williams got onstage to sing, she left new aspiring rockers behind. At this point, everybody's now just trying to take care of Hayley's unfinished misery business.

The arguments rage on about what's "authentic" or "original" in pop punk, whether that means young artists like Jxdn copping the sound or Blink-182's Vegas residency. On some levels, it's comical to think of this genre, of literally all genres, having gatekeepers and authenticity cops. Now, we live in a world where artists can be accused of degrading and demeaning the artistic dignity of the All-American Rejects. But that's part of the pop-punk story, as it keeps evolving and mutating into the future. Nobody would have guessed this music would age so well, just getting more important and influential through the years. But I guess this is growing up. ®

SAMUEL GEHRKE

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE AN ARTIST

JIM BEAM RECONNECTS MUSE TO THE COMMUNITY THAT RAISED THEM

PRESENTED BY

In our first feature, Jim Beam brings Muse home to a tiny stage in the South West of England, reuniting them to the early community that created the global band we know today.

Written by WILL "ILL WILL" LAVIN

Muse performing at the Cavern club in front of fans, some of the band's old school friends, a few family members and Cavern owners

The last time Muse set foot on stage together was two and a half years ago in Lima, Peru, the final date of their *Simulation Theory* world tour. The show was an explosive, sci-fi circus rife with majestic dystopian themes, and laser tag neon lighting. These bandstand theatrics have been a trademark of the trio's live shows for almost two decades, but for their first gig since 2019, they're taking a different approach. Thanks to Jim Beam, the band is returning to their hometown, for an intimate performance in front of the community that raised them.

"We first played at the Cavern when we were about 16, 17 years old," remembers frontman Matt Bellamy. "We had dreamed for years about performing there." Located in Exeter, Devon, the Cavern is a staple in England's South West music community. As well as being where Muse cut their teeth as live performers, the Queen Street venue has played host to marquee names like Coldplay and The 1975.

Muse—comprising Matt Bellamy (vocals/guitar), Chris Wolstenholme (bass), and Dom Howard (drums)—have been brought back to their old stomping grounds by Jim Beam for a secret homecoming show. It serves as the latest instalment of the brand's Welcome Sessions, a live event series that explores music's role in fostering belonging and community by bringing artists like Wolf Alice and Jack Garratt back to the stages that first welcomed them. Now partnering with Muse, this latest event underscores Jim Beam's focus on music and community. A long-celebrated belief that you truly feel connected when belonging to a community—a sentiment rooted in Jim Beam's two-century history of bringing people together.

It's in this spirit that Muse has returned to their hometown of Teignmouth, a slow-paced seaside locale that sits on the mouth of the River Teign. Back then, the trio performed for whoever would listen, strapping on their instruments at house parties, local sports halls, and the occasional family-friendly event. "We played a roller disco once," remembers Wolstenholme "We were [usually] pitched up in the corner, and no one cared. I'm not sure anyone was really aware we were even there."

Dennis Smith, Sawmills Studio

Pippa Wragg Smith, Exeter Cavern

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Despite the lack of interest, Muse rose to stardom with the backing of their community. This tight-knit cluster of supporters included schoolmates, girlfriends, and newfound fans. "They were popular kids," recalls Pippa Wragg Smith, co-owner of the Cavern. Wragg Smith and her business partner Dave Goodchild, were responsible for booking Muse for their first show at The Cavern and her excitement for their return is visible. "I think Muse have always wanted to come back and play here" she says. "The whole narrative of Jim Beam, bringing people back to their roots and the community together...that's exactly what's happening when Muse play tonight."

The band performed at the Cavern more than 30 times in five years. "I remember vividly the last time we played there thinking that it would probably be the last time that we played it unless there was a good reason to come back. And I think this whole idea of music in the community and how important it is in the community, it's a good thing to celebrate." says Wolstenholme. "Music is always best when you share it with other people," he says. "Had it not been for the Cavern, the band probably wouldn't exist."

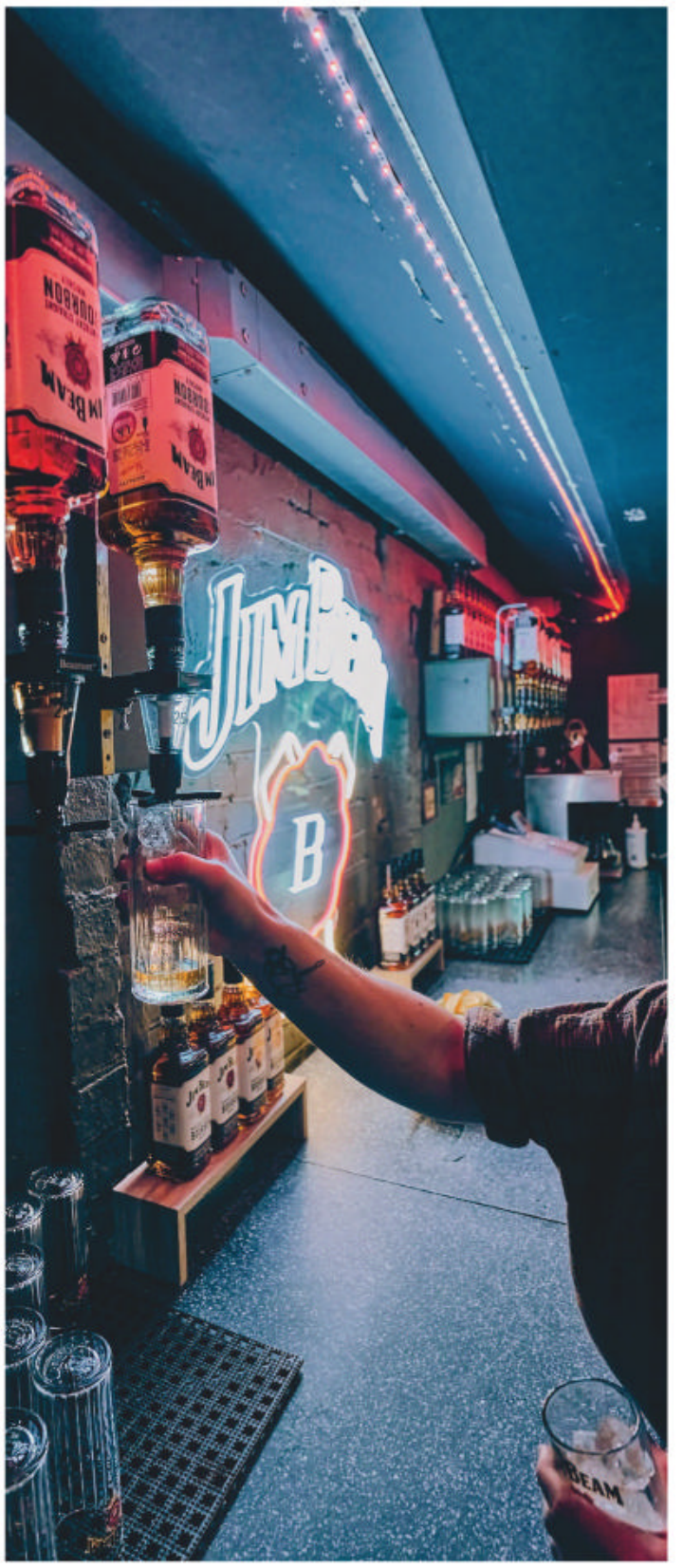
Attending tonight's show are some of the band's earliest and most passionate fans', a few family members, and, of course, Cavern owners Wragg Smith and Goodchild. The atmosphere is hyperkinetic, and as the lights dim, the crowd takes a collective deep breath. Muse then takes the stage to rapturous applause.

In short order, the band tears through a setlist of stadium hits ('Supermassive Black Hole," "Plug In Baby") and fan favourites ('Stockholm Syndrome', 'Psycho') before debuting their latest singles "Won't Stand Down" and "Compliance." The energy in the room is electric, and amongst the highly excitable fans there's another familiar face in the back of the tightly packed crowd: Dennis Smith, the owner of Sawmills, the famous South West studio where Muse recorded their early demos and debut album, *Showbiz*.

Smith, who managed the band in their early years, took a chance on them. "Very quickly, I got the impression that they were mates which is very important," he says. "So many people come through places like the Cavern in their earlier years. We had the opportunity to give them studio time, but I said, 'you've got work to do and you're still learning your craft on stage, so you should really carry on practicing at shows. Then, we'll hit the ground running when it feels right.'" That's precisely what they did, and the rest is history.

Smith's support is just another example of how the community that raised Muse was vital to building their foundation. Bellamy explains, "I got a phone call when I was 16, 17 from Dennis Smith, the owner of that studio," he says. "He came to see us play and he said, 'look if you work up enough material on what you think would make a good debut album then give me a call and I'd love to listen to the demos and maybe I'll give you some free studio time.' So that was a major break for us as it gave us the inspiration to really work on the material and create good demos."

As the saying goes, it takes a village, and this is undoubtedly true in Muse's case. The overwhelming support of their wider community evidently played an essential role in them stepping into the big leagues; it's something Bellamy doesn't take for granted. "Without the ongoing support of our community we wouldn't be here today. After nearly four years away, it's brilliant to partner with Jim Beam to reconnect with our fans."



"IF IT WASN'T FOR THE DESIRE TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN A COMMUNITY, I DON'T THINK WE'D BE HERE, TO BE HONEST"

— Chris Wolstenholme

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SPOTLIGHT

Jerrod Carmichael Is Finished Hiding

With his startlingly confessional special 'Rothaniel,' the comedian transcended the form – and changed his life

By DAN HYMAN

MOVING THROUGH the lobby of a posh Santa Monica hotel one May afternoon, Jerrod Carmichael is not so much walking as strutting. Tall and slender, he's wearing a black cashmere sweater, matching pants, loafers, an Afro pick, and an outsize smile. And then there's the brooch: Stunning gold. Cursive font. The letter R. "I love it so much," Carmichael says, gazing down to admire the pin. It was a gift from a friend a few weeks ago, for Carmichael's 35th birthday. Ever since, he's been "building outfits around it."

The R is a beautiful piece of jewelry, to be sure. But it's much more than a sartorial statement piece. It represents a rebirth for the comedian. R is the first letter of his real first name, Rothaniel (Jerrod is his middle name), which he revealed in his most recent comedy special, along with a host of family secrets, including his own: that he is gay.

"I don't feel like a liar anymore," Carmichael says as we take one of his favorite strolls down Wilshire Boulevard, toward the Instagram-famous health-food haven Erewhon. "I've been using the word 'sturdy' a lot lately. Like, I feel sturdy. I think I'm accepting a lot of things in my life and not fighting it anymore."

He may have been a liar, but Carmichael was a damn successful one: As a comedian, writer, producer, actor, and director, he's been delivering critically acclaimed work for nearly a decade, from his first stand-up special, 2014's *Love at the Store*, to his NBC sitcom, *The Carmichael Show*, which he starred in and that was loosely based on his life, to his autobiographical documentaries, *Home Videos* and *Sermon on the Mount*. Along the way, he accumulated an A-list circle of friends: Kanye West; Dave Chappelle; Tyler, the Creator; Jay-Z and Beyoncé. After directing Lil Rel Howery's 2019 stand-up special, he branched into feature directing with *On the Count of Three*, a darkly comic indie about two suicidal friends (played by Carmichael and *Girls*' Christopher Abbott) on a final, *Thelma & Louise*-style mission. It premiered at Sundance in 2021 and was released in theaters last month.

But nothing broke through for Carmichael like *Rothaniel* (which debuted in April and is still streaming on HBO Max). While his stand-up has always been provocative and fearless – his first special features jokes about Trayvon Martin, 9/11, and how life as a descendant of slaves in America is better than it would be in Africa – the confessional nature of *Rothaniel* is a revelation. Carmichael is raw and open throughout, and for once experiencing some of the discomfort he normally revels in pushing onto his audiences. Sitting center stage on a simple folding chair rather than standing, he shifts in his seat, holding long pauses, in conversation with the crowd as he grapples with the reality he's kept from his family, the world, and himself. "I need you," he tells the audience early on. "This only works if we feel like family."

Carmichael had gradually come out to his friends over the past few years. His longtime writing partner, Ari Katcher, recalls it being "a slow progression." It started with offhand, jokey remarks ("I like pretty faces," he once told Katcher. "I like girls' pretty faces, I like guys' pretty faces.") before Carmichael began identifying as bisexual. "And then it became explicit stories about sex with men," Katcher recalls. "Then it became, 'I'm gay and it's important for me to say that.' "

"Fuck my dreams. I don't expect to be anywhere because I'm gay or Black. Don't give me that shit. That's why I worked so hard."

But coming out publicly, to the industry, to fans, to his own family, was a massive leap forward – one that's brought him joy and some measure of relief, but also a whirlwind of emotions he's still processing every day. "It's happening in real time," Carmichael says. "I'm coming to terms with it. I'm saying it to friends. I'm digging through years of bullshit. I'm doing psychoanalysis and becoming more open, more honest, more direct."

BACK IN the Morningside Manor section of his native Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he was born to a secretary mother and truck-driver father, back when he was forever armed with a camcorder and constantly writing plays and poetry and making movies, back when he dated girls in high school, Carmichael had a friend named Ashley. For a while there, right after high school graduation, Ashley stopped talking to Jerrod. He wouldn't return to her good graces, she told him, unless he agreed to try out stand-up comedy. Carmichael brushed her off. Sure, he was funny. But, as he

explained to *Fresh Air*'s Terry Gross, "the average Black person is a top 10 comedian." Was he really that unique?

A more effective push came from a less-expected place: a customer at the Finish Line sneaker store where Carmichael was working in 2008. The guy was an actor who encouraged Carmichael to head west and try his hand at stand-up. So, a 21-year-old Carmichael packed his bags and flew to Hollywood, couch surfing and hitting up any open mic that would take him once he landed. Ryan Welch, a friend of Carmichael's (and co-writer of *On the Count of Three*) who was doing stand-up in L.A. at the time, was struck by his lack of desperation. "Jerrod had such a different energy," says Welch, recalling Carmichael's willingness to do material on topics like molestation at the risk of losing an audience. "He had this calm, confident presence. He was going to do what he wanted to do, which is the opposite of a lot of what you see in that setting." Katcher, who was also working the city's comedy clubs at the time, says Carmichael quickly became "the king of the open mics."

Others took notice: In 2011, Carmichael was offered – and turned down – the role of Winston on *New Girl*. He had greater aspirations than being a sitcom regular: "I came into the industry knowing what I wanted. I wrote down in notebooks, 'Three HBO specials and a show on NBC.' That's not me being a dick or an asshole. That's protecting a vision." Within three years, he made good on his wishes, landing his first HBO special with *Love at the Store* (which was directed by Spike Lee) and a breakout supporting role in the Seth Rogen comedy *Neighbors*. Soon after, NBC greenlit *The Carmichael Show*.

Lasting for three seasons, from 2015 to 2017, the series, like his stand-up, pushed buttons, tackling topics from Bill Cosby to Black Lives Matter and the Confederate flag. One controversial episode argues that it's OK for certain white people to use the n-word, because it dilutes its power. "I took on perspectives that nobody on television would dare," Carmichael says, settling into a lunch of salmon and jasmine rice. "I knew what I wanted to do. And I was really specific about it and I fought for it, and the shit got awkward a lot, and people threatened to quit a lot, every week. That shit's hell and you fight for it. 'Cause it's mine."

Ultimately, though, Carmichael was fighting not just for the message, but for the medium, too. In other words, whether it's stand-up or a sitcom or a movie, it has to hold up, and it has to entertain. "It's too much make-a-wish in art," he says. "Fuck that. I don't care about your dreams. Fuck your dreams. Is it good? Is it funny? That's the only thing that matters. I don't expect to be anywhere because I'm gay or because I'm Black. Don't give me that shit. That's why I think I worked so hard. That's why I was in the closet."

Carmichael had always been boundary-pushing in his work, but as the years went by, he began peeling back more and more layers. At the end of his second HBO special, 2017's *8*, he casually revealed his father had a second family. And with 2019's *Home Videos* and *Sermon on the Mount*, he went back home to Winston-Salem and had deep, interrogative conversations with his family about everything from being Black to same-sex relationships. (In *Home Videos*, he mentions to his mother that he's "hooked up" with men. Her retort: "OK, that's your option.")

ON THE OTHER SIDE
"There are devastating things in my life now that have tempered some of the happiness, but I am much happier in many ways."

Late last year, he began testing out material for what became *Rothaniel*, working it out in clubs across the country – Atlanta, San Francisco, Boston. The act took on different incarnations. At first, Carmichael says, he was "obsessed" with the idea of airing a live special, but eventually he arrived at the softer, more contemplative performance we see in the final product.

"When I first started doing it, I was leaning on old joke tricks," he explains. "And I was like, 'No, that's not what we're showcasing anymore.' "

Instead, Carmichael began to take more of a "stage show" approach to the material, where it came to resemble one long confessional. His friend Tyler, the Creator says the work in *Rothaniel* sets Carmichael apart from even his most famous contemporaries: "The honesty he has talking about himself is something that I don't think Chris Rock or Chappelle could do. . . about them, about their love life, or family. That super raw and honest stuff. [Jerrod] was just like, 'Here is my chest.' A lot of people can't do that or haven't done that. I think he opened up a door for other people – whether in music, comedians, TV writers, a fucking doctor, the lady at Starbucks who gives you [your] coffee. . . . Everyone, after watching that, turned their TV off and started thinking about their mom or what they were going through. He made motherfuckers sit and think about their shit. I think that's going to hold over with a lot of gravity. More than he thinks."

THE GRAVITY is still there for Carmichael, too. On the heels of *Rothaniel*'s release, Carmichael hosted *Saturday Night Live*, made the late-night rounds, appeared on *Howard Stern*, and even made a stop on *The View*. For more than a month, the spotlight hasn't left him. But while much of the world has embraced him in the wake of his coming out, his fiercely religious mother – whose tepid response he spoke about in the special, and then again on a visit to *Late Night With Seth Meyers* – has yet to even acknowledge it as fact. If she flat-out refused to accept his sexuality, it wouldn't bother him, Carmichael says. It's her acting like it isn't even a reality that hurts the most. "That's depriving a plant of sunlight," he says.

"There are devastating things in my life now that have kind of tempered some of the happiness," he adds, referring to the strained relationship with his mother. "But I am much happier in many ways."

As we walk back to his hotel, Carmichael does seem at ease. He pauses to point out an attractive man he says looks like "a cute mouse." He's looking forward to a friend's birthday party in a few hours at Magic Johnson's TGI Friday's in Inglewood. We pop into a Starbucks, where he insists on paying for both of our coffees, launching into a story about a time he tried to cover Jay-Z and Beyoncé's meal after they'd seen him perform at the Laugh Factory: "Jay-Z grabbed my card like it had piss on it. He grabbed it with just his thumb and index finger, just, like it was wet," he says with a laugh, "and kind of tossed it onto my lap. I've never felt poorer before in my life."

Soon, the conversation turns more serious, with Carmichael talking about the importance of mentorship. He's provided his fair share of it to others, like his friend Ramy Youssef, whose eponymous Hulu show he executive-produced, and comedian Drew Michael, whose 2018 HBO special he directed. He's also received a good bit of it: screenwriting advice from Quentin Tarantino when they worked on a *Django/Zorro* sequel that never came to be; an endorsement from Kanye as they drove to a music festival ("Know why I fuck with you and Tyler? Because y'all not scared").

Now, he's carrying that value forward in a new way. *Rothaniel* wasn't just for him, Carmichael says. Nor are all the interviews and appearances he's done since coming out. Carmichael knows how essential it is to see ourselves reflected in the world, to help us figure out who we can become. He's being so transparent about his journey in the hope that young gay people watching or listening or reading might connect with his struggle: "For anyone who's following me, for any kid who needs to see it or hear that process, I want to be open for them. I'm saying it so they can know that 'Yeah, shit's not always OK.' "

The process has been a bloodletting, but it's also left him feeling stronger, Carmichael adds, able to see "the strings on the monster" – things that were holding him back for so many years. Now, he says, "I am clear."

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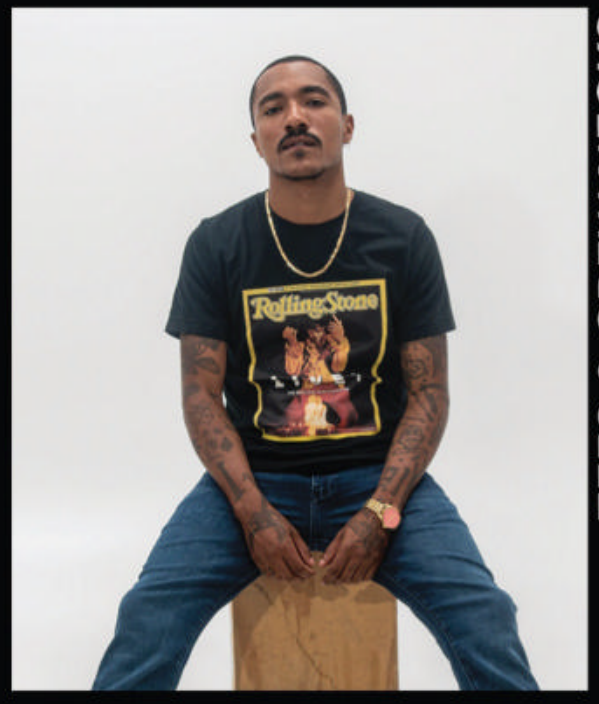

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PROFILE

The Rapper Who Wants to Run His Country

In the 1990s, Shyne was a rising rap star. Then he went to prison and found God. Now, he's on the campaign trail

By SEAN WILLIAMS

RUN THIS TOWN Shyne at a party in New York last August. He returns to the U.S. often to "promote" Belize.

AT AN EMPTY beach bar in Corozal, a shaggy town of a few thousand people just minutes from where northern Belize meets Mexico's share of the Yucatan Peninsula, waves crash into a jagged, rocky breakwater. It's 9 p.m., the kitchen is about to close, and the only people left are some young, very loud, and very sober American missionaries. Another languid Caribbean day is winding down, but my dinner companion, Moses Michael Levi "Shyne" Barrow, has no desire to linger over a meal and conversation. He's shoveling in his fried fish, rice, and beans faster than an escaped hostage, and brushing off my questions about his remarkable life – from Brooklyn-raised rapper to convicted felon to Orthodox Jewish convert to prominent politician here in the country of his birth – with blunt rejoinders.

"I want you to be more specific, rather than just sitting here having a therapy session," he grumbles, raising his hand to make a drink order.

Folks come to Corozal to fish, visit Mayan ruins, or increasingly, ship cocaine into the United States. That's a problem for a tiny nation of around 400,000 people with crime so chronic, some think it's on the brink of an all-out gang war. Shyne would rather talk about this, or education, or strengthening Belize's judiciary as part of his quest to become the nation's next prime minister, a position his own father once held.

To that end, he's been on a global media offensive, trading on his starry past as a rapper in Diddy's Bad Boy stable to raise his political profile – or, in his telling, to "sell" Belize to the world. Earlier this year, on a visit to the U.S., he appeared on *The Wendy Williams Show* and *Drink Champs*. He's just returned from London, where he joined Afrobeats artist Davido onstage in front of 20,000 people. He was in Corozal today to schmooze United Democratic Party delegates, who in two weeks will elect him their leader. Tomorrow morning, he'll drive two hours south to Belize City, the country's cultural and commercial heart, to attend the funeral of a political rival's partner. Then he'll work his hometown constituency of Mesopotamia, a part of Belize City that's been described as one of the most violent places on Earth. He is jetlagged and irritable. Sentimentality is low on the agenda. So subjects like Diddy, Shyne's late-Nineties superstardom, the club shooting that put him in prison, his pilgrimages to Jerusalem – these are "the past," he says disparagingly. Move on.

So we do, and Shyne orders a bottle of merlot, and by the time it's half-drained, he's in more of a gregarious mood, talking about building a "Belizean Dream" for his people, palms outstretched like Obama, with whom he shares more than his raw-boned physical likeness. Shyne is athletic and slender, dressed in a fitted navy suit and tieless white shirt. Time has done little more than to sprinkle a bit of gray in his close-cropped hair. And that never did a guy on the campaign trail any harm. He's got the Obama-brand optimism down pat, too. Fixing poverty in the U.S.? Tricky. Doing it for under half a million people in Belize? "We could solve it," he says. He's deeply engaging, if adversarial, demanding "point-

THE SEEKER At Jerusalem's Wailing Wall in 2010. Shyne converted to Orthodox Judaism while in prison, and after his release he moved to Israel in 2011.

THIS SPREAD, FROM TOP: DAVID YELLEN/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES; JOHNNY NUÑEZ/WIREIMAGE; RICKI ROSEN/"THE NEW YORK TIMES"/REDUX

GREAT EXPECTATIONS Shyne in an undated photo. As a teenager in Brooklyn, he ran with the Decepticons gang.

ed questions." The discussion is not enjoyable, per se. But I'm drawn in.

Which is perhaps because Shyne Barrow is an actual 43-year-old palimpsest, a bunch of guys baked into one: the rap phenom, the convict, the religious scholar, the statesman. He shifts between them from one sentence to another, sometimes mid-sentence, and not just in his voice, which tracks from a Caribbean lilt to a Brooklyn drawl. It's more than code-switching. It's like different chapters of Shyne's life are scrapping for his soul in real time.

Belizeans are grappling with this, too. Yes, Shyne is a tough kid from the streets who made it big, lost everything, and rebuilt his life. But he's also the former leader's son, political royalty in a nation whose crony politics continually fail to make any measurable improvement in its citizens' lives.

"He knows both sides of the struggle, while most politicians cannot," says Dwayne, a former Crip, at his coconut-water stand just south of Mesopotamia. "They don't know what it is for you to be hungry, or you to be broke and your kids are crying and you don't have any way to feed them."

One young gang member has a more jaded view: "He's trying to put Belize on the map. I like that." But, he adds, once you vote someone into office in Belize, "they are good for nothing."

IN 1996, 17-year-old Jamal Michael Barrow was headed down a bad road. His mom, Frances Myvett, had brought Jamal from Belize to Crown Heights, Brooklyn, when he was seven. His father, a powerful attorney and politician named Dean Barrow, was in a relationship with another woman and forsook him. "The nigga said his two other kids were made out of love," Jamal would tell a reporter years later. "It was devastating. That shit really fucked me up."

New York offered opportunities tiny Belize couldn't. But Myvett cleaned homes, and Barrow slept on the couch of their tiny apartment. No vacations, no allowance, no trips to the movies.

The gang scene lured him in. Barrow rolled with the Decepticons, a Brooklyn crew named for the villains in *The Transformers,* who were notorious for slinging drugs and robbing students in Flatbush – Gatbush, they called it. Barrow went by the street name Shyne – "to enlighten," he told me: "I was always the Lawrence Fishburne from *Boyz n the Hood* in my block." But in 1996, Shyne got into a fight with a kid who shot him, leaving him with a six-inch scar across his right shoulder.

It was a bloody wake-up call. "I understood that you had to have humility, had to walk away and look at the

bigger picture," he says. "I didn't really understand that before I got shot."

Chastened, Shyne cleaned up his act. He graduated high school, enrolled at a City Tech computer program, and bankrolled it working as a bike messenger. "I wasn't gonna sell drugs, I wasn't gonna get involved in criminal activity, I knew I gotta work," he says. "And the quickest way to do that was to deliver messages. So I would ride my 18-speed from Brooklyn to Manhattan, ride around Manhattan all day – taxis were almost running me over, girls at the front desk looking at me like I was the worst thing in the world. And through that experience, music just started coming to me."

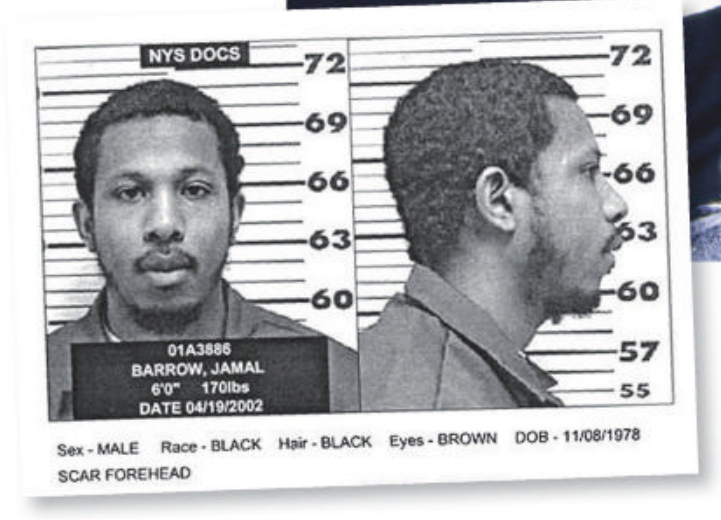
First it was just a few rhymes scribbled on the back of his messenger clipboard – "poems," his mom called them. But soon enough, he was writing everywhere – in class, in the bathroom. He couldn't stop. "I don't remember those rhymes," he says, "but I do remember that those were some of the best rhymes you will ever hear."

As a kid, Shyne had stood on chairs at the back of the crowd to catch outdoor shows in Brooklyn's Little Caribbean neighborhood: Earth, Wind, and Fire; Chaka Khan; reggae; calypso; anything. He loved it. "I remember just being enthralled by the performances," he says. "And if I wanted to grow up to be anything, I wanted to be a performer in front of tens of thousands of people."

He'd been a shy child, but staring down the barrel of a gun had changed him, turned him "fearless." In 1997, Shyne got hit by a white-hot laser beam of conviction that he could get up onstage and mix it with hip-hop's best – a "burst of supertalent," as he calls it. Above all it was "certitude," he tells me, leaning back on his chair and tapping into the bombast of his rap persona. "The conviction that Martin Luther King had, that Malcolm X had."

Shyne's salty baritone bore a close resemblance to that of Christopher "Notorious B.I.G." Wallace, another disciple of Brooklyn's violent streets whose parents had emigrated from the Caribbean. It was just months after assailants gunned down Wallace in L.A. that Shyne road-tested his supertalent at a barbershop on Church Avenue, Little Caribbean's beating heart. The regulars loved it. "Barbers don't lie – especially on Church Avenue," he tells me. "It's not like you gonna come in there and they're gonna tell you what you wanna hear."

"The metaphors and the way he put together his rhymes, I was like, 'Man, you're dope,'" says Robert "Don Pooh" Cummins, a record executive best known for discovering Foxy Brown. He came to Church Avenue, and offered to represent Shyne to the major labels. "Everybody knew when they heard him that this was gonna be good."



BAD BOY FOR LIFE Right: Shyne with Combs at the 1998 Grammys. Shyne was the hottest young rapper out of Brooklyn, and signed with Bad Boy because he felt a kinship with Combs, who also grew up without a father. In 1999, they were involved in a club shooting that landed Shyne in prison for 10 years. "I took the fall for my friends," he says. "But that's the way life is."

Pretty soon everybody in the industry wanted a piece of Shyne – despite the fact he hadn't recorded a single demo. Of all his suitors, Shyne saw a kindred spirit in Sean Combs, who, like him, had grown up fatherless in New York. He signed with Combs' Bad Boy Records for what the press termed a "million-dollar deal."

To Shyne, who says he believes in "an intelligent designer," the deal was vindication from above. "I believe that the architect of the universe created the universe so you can be whatever you wanna be," he tells me. "And your access to being whatever you wanna be is working hard, it's sacrifice. And when you work hard and you sacrifice, that's when your dreams start to come to reality. So, it was a sacrifice for me not to sell drugs and not to be committing crimes, and to deliver messages and go to university at night. But I had my mind set that that was what I wanted to do."

All that self-discipline came undone in those first few months with Bad Boy, when, as Shyne puts it, "everything started going crazy." He dropped tens of thousands on cars, furs, and jewels that earned him a reputation – even by Nineties standards – as a brat. He started wearing five watches. A labelmate once walked in on Shyne trying to unjam an AK-47.

Then, in 1998, Shyne wrecked a Mercedes, killing a friend. It left him a "zombie," producing tracks that were, by his own admission, "garbage." Combs chewed out Shyne, telling him, "Yeah, you can rap, but I gotta teach you how to make hits."

Just as he'd done after the shooting in 1996, Shyne clicked into gear. He was "one of the hardest-working artists that I've ever seen on the label," former Bad Boy producer Harve Pierre told *XXL*. "He was always at the studio. . . . He would sleep at the studio."

His first hit was "Bad Boyz," a rugged diary of life on the streets with a Caribbean beat and vocals by Jamaican dancehall star Barrington Levy. If anybody thought Shyne was bullshit, his lyrics didn't hold back: "Pour the Cristal on the way to trial/RICO Law got a nigga head hurtin'/Squirtin' till they pull the curtain."

"I understood that you had to have humility, had to walk away and look at the bigger picture," Shyne says today. "And I didn't really understand that before I got shot."

The "Bad Boyz" video was shot in Kingston, Jamaica. But it was a part-homage to Belize, where Shyne would spend several weeks each summer in Mesopotamia, a tight-wound collection of concrete streets and colonial homes on the south side of the Belize River. Each year Shyne saw his absent father climb the country's political ranks until he was crowned opposition leader with the UDP in 1998. Shyne's resentment burned through "Bad Boyz": "My father bust and unloaded me/Think he just finished sniffin' a KI and dippin' the D's."

But despite the family tension, Shyne never gave up on his home nation, a former logwood-trading outpost that won independence and changed its name from British Honduras in 1981. "I've always been a patriot, a nationalist," he tells me over his second glass of wine. "The difference between me and other politicians is that they have an ambition to be the prime minister of Belize. They have an ambition to be the leader of the United Democratic Party. Those titles are just tools and byproducts of a purpose to serve my country and humanity. My dream has always been to change the lives of as many people as possible."

THE NEXT MORNING, I take a stroll through Mesopotamia, or "Mesop," as the locals call it. It is blistering hot, and sleepy. Folks shoot the shit leaning on garden fences or phone poles covered in "SHYNE" stencils. By lunch, there are long queues outside a couple of

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hole-in-the-wall fried-chicken joints, where the food gets washed down with cheap Belikin beer sold at Chinese-owned bodegas, the most visible aspect of a recent, modest immigration wave from the East.

Mesop's most conspicuous American imports are the kids riding BMXs dressed in red; Bloods who run these couple-dozen blocks in the heart of southside. A few streets north or south, and it's Crip territory – but Belize City's gangs are splintering at such a rate that there could be a different crew for just about any corner.

And they're armed. The first Bloods and Crips returned from the U.S. in 1981, Belizeans who'd fled after a 1961 hurricane flattened Belize City so comprehensively that its colonial administrators moved the capital 50 miles inland, to a podunk jungle clearing called Belmopan. By 1985, the Belizean outposts of those gangs were the fourth-biggest suppliers of marijuana to the States. Beefs were settled with blades. Bloody, but rarely fatal.

By the Nineties, guerrillas in Guatemala and El Salvador had flooded Belize with firearms. Mexican cartels piloted boats onto any one of the nation's 450 cayes, or landed planes in jungle so dense it's still leased out to train foreign soldiers. Toward the end of the millennium, a southside narco named George Herbert became the undisputed king of Belize's underworld, hooking up cartels with corrupt politicians to ship coke north. But when the DEA captured Herbert in 2004, chaos broke out. By 2011, Belize City's murder rate was on a par with some conflict zones. Last year, for the first time since 2013, the city's murder rate dropped just below what is deemed commensurate with civil war.

Today, cocaine is Belize's biggest black-market commodity, flying in under the nose of a government that has a tiny military and no radar systems. When cops do capture a drug plane, its crew and payload disappear. Rival Belizean cops have even engaged in shootouts while loading planes. "It's a small country," says former cop Abdul Marin Nunez, now a social worker. "Before a plane travels, it has to send its manifest to the Ministry of National Security. So, they are aware that the drug planes are coming."

Shyne likes this subject – it's one that lets him twist the knife into members of the UDP's rival People's United Party, whose current leader, Johnny Briceño, is the son of a convicted drug trafficker, and who's weathered plenty of his own scandals, including an alleged oil bribe in 2011. ("It's certainly ironic to have a prime minister whose family is affiliated with drug trafficking," Shyne notes.) As far as his plan to address the issue, Shyne knows his country is far too small to bust cartels – the Sinaloa organization has more than double the number of members than there are people in Belize City. Rather, he's focused on strengthening Belizean governance to keep criminals on their toes. "You can't have a solution to crime that is not inclusive of penalties, and not inclusive of consequences to criminal action," he says. "And you see the judiciary drop cases left and right due to lack of evidence." He wants to raise cops' salaries, too: "Why go the extra mile when you can't make ends meet and you're going from paycheck to paycheck?"

But fundamentally, Shyne is more interested in laying the foundation for a nation where regular people don't wind up jobless and searching for a quick buck. "Let's make student loans available at low interest rates, and make it like the States, where you don't need to pay unless you've got a job," he

HOMETOWN HERO
Shyne was elected to represent Mesopotamia, in Belize City, in 2020. In April, he became the leader of Belize's United Democratic Party. "Thank God I'm in a position where I can try and do my best for my country," he says.

says. "The average family doesn't have the money to put their kid through school . . . so they'll be stuck."

Eric Adams, New York's former gang member turned mayor, who also preaches about educating the city's youth, is a source of great inspiration. "In America, with all its problems, you can get a mortgage, you can build your house, you can get an education," Shyne continues. "I want to create a Belize where everyone has access to the 'Belizean Dream.' It doesn't matter who you are: If you're willing to work hard, you'll get access to education, you'll get access to finance to start your business, to build your house."

That might not be enough. MS-13, the L.A.-born Salvadoran gang feared for its indiscriminate killing, has recently made landfall in Belize. "If we let MS-13 come in here," Nunez says, "that's going to spell mayhem. There is going to be carnage here."

Carnage is something Shyne knows about.

Dear America, I'm only what you made me
Young, Black, and fuckin' crazy
Please save me
I'm a lost cause
But what about the rest?
Don't them suckas deserve a chance?
Somethin' better then shootouts, liquor stores, and food stamps
Maybe if y'all teach them niggas a craft and a trade they wouldn't have to play that corner.

By late 1999, Shyne had put the car wreck behind him and awaited the release of his self-titled debut LP. It was 16 tracks about drugs, sex, and gang violence. But the opening salvo, a spoken-word poem called "Dear America," showed glimpses of the politician he'd become once his home turf relocated a couple of thousand miles south.

The incident that would eventually prompt that move took place just before the end of the year, on Dec. 27, in an infamous club shooting that became a tabloid-fed pop-culture moment. That night, Shyne, Combs, and Combs' then-girlfriend Jennifer Lopez were at Club New York in Times Square when Combs knocked a drink from the hand of Matthew "Scar" Allen, a well-known Brooklyn roughneck. In the ensuing fracas, somebody threw a stack of bills at Combs, who witnesses said fired a bullet into the air. Shyne pulled a 9 mm Ruger pistol from his waistband and fired it too. Three people were injured.

Combs and Lopez fled in a Lincoln Navigator driven by Combs' chauffeur, who ran 11 red lights before cops pulled them over, finding a gun on the seat. Shyne had already been nabbed outside the club. He was hit with eight charges, including three counts of attempted murder.

As he and Combs awaited separate trials (Combs was charged with weapons possession and for bribing his driver to take the gun charge on his behalf), Shyne's star continued to rise. "Bad Boyz" was the hit of the summer of 2000, blasted out of Chevy Tahoes and on stoops up and down Church Avenue, and when *Shyne* was released that September, it placed fifth on the *Billboard* 200. Shyne was even invited onto Bill Maher's ABC show *Politically Incorrect*, where the host asked him about guns in rap culture. Shyne responded: "You know, the NRA, the gun lobbyists, they make guns. You know, ain't no Uzis made in Harlem. The problem is all to do with economics. What you're doing is you're ignoring a problem that exists in America, and that's why that problem is going to continue."

On March 15, 2001, a Manhattan jury found Shyne guilty of assault, gun possession, and reckless endangerment. Judge Charles Solomon sympathized with the young star's "very, very bad decision," but added that he had discharged his pistol in a club "as crowded as a subway in rush hour," and sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

Myvett was stunned. Her son's lawyers "didn't do their job for him," she complained. They "were working more for the other guy" – Combs [*Cont. on 80*]

PHOTOGRAPH BY **Aquila Flores**

Q&A

Soccer Mommy

The indie rocker on her experimental new album, feeling like Sylvia Plath, and the joys of being off social media

By ANGIE MARTOCCIO

SOPHIE ALLISON listens to a lot of country radio. "I hear all these songs about guys and their trucks," the singer-songwriter behind Soccer Mommy says, calling from her Tennessee home a few weeks before her 25th birthday. "It's so goofy, but it speaks to you, especially when you're from the South." That imagery inspired Allison to write "Feel It All the Time," a hazy rocker about her own pickup. "It was a challenge to myself," she says. "The idea of mentioning my truck in a song and having it not be, like, the cheesiest thing you've ever heard." She won that bet and then some. "Feel It All the Time" appears on her third studio LP, *Sometimes, Forever,* produced by avant-garde noisemaker Daniel Lopatin. "It's important to constantly be trying to change yourself," she adds. "I don't ever want to be in a box."

There's some intense imagery on this album — like the line on "Darkness Forever" where you allude to Sylvia Plath's suicide. How did you get there?
The song got started when I literally had the thought, "I could imagine why you would want to do that." At the time, I was feeling very overwhelmed and paranoid, and my brain was on fire. The song is about taking that and twisting it into this idea of burning down your house and everything in it, including yourself, to expel the demons that live within you.

There's a sense of magic on the album, too.
That's funny, because me and Dan would joke, "We've got the normal songs, and then we've got the evil songs, and the magic songs." There is a lot of dark fantasy and some mysticism happening.

On "Feel It All the Time," you sing, "I'm just 22 going on 23/Already worn down from everything." How do you feel now, in your mid-twenties?
That song is one of my favorites, from a songwriting standpoint. I'm making this metaphor of comparing my body to my truck, because it's a 2002 – it's pretty old. I was comparing my life span to this truck's life span and wanting to cling to this freedom: just driving my truck on a long road with the window down, this lightness of time, and stress not existing.

Prior to the pandemic, you spent more than a year on the road, opening for artists like Liz Phair and Kacey Musgraves. What did you take from that?
Those tours were fun. When you're doing those kinds of tours with artists that are so amazing, all you want to do is get to work, in a sense. The Liz Phair one was the only solo tour I've ever done. The Kacey tour, she had just won the Grammy [for 2018's *Golden Hour*]. It was this moment of, like, "Wow!" It was really cool to see someone like that win Album of the Year.

The guitarist in your band is also your long-term partner. What's that like?
It's great. I mean, I've never toured without him. We've lived together for five years and been together for six. We are very much the type of people that can have a lot of fun together, but also like our own space. We exist very well together.

You briefly studied the music industry at NYU. Did you learn anything that helped you in your career?
I was at NYU for two years, but I was only in music business for one year. It's no hate on the program to say that I didn't walk away with that much information that was new to me. But one thing I did take away was this idea of everybody's trying to fuck you from every angle. We'd look at contracts and see these ways to try to get things out of people. It made me very much like, "I don't want to pay anyone to do anything that I can handle doing." . . . I was like, "I am here on scholarship. My parents take care of me, but I can't have someone fund my career."

Do you miss the DIY scene you came up in, playing small venues in New York like Silent Barn?
Oh, my God. I loved Silent Barn. My first-ever show as Soccer Mommy was there. It was fun and exciting. All these cities have their own DIY scenes where it runs on people's generosity – it's so community-oriented. It's a much more fun way, until you get to a point where I could no longer do that, even if I wanted to. You'd get mobbed. Venues that don't have space for you to be away from people can be a little bit uncomfortable and creepy. It's unfortunate that you can't just do that forever.

Has fame lived up to your expectations?
I do not enjoy it. But I also never thought that I would particularly enjoy it, either. I never was like, "When I'm famous . . . " I'm just not very comfortable with strangers. I'm a Gemini. I've become more reclusive, for sure, but I'm fine with it. I can still go out to a show in Nashville. I don't think I'm some celebrity that can't go out.

What's your relationship with social media like?
I'm not on it. Any of it. I'll log on Instagram every once in a while to check my messages and respond to friends. That's it. It's honestly great. I just replaced it with solitaire and word games.

Do you have any advice for younger musicians who want to be indie stars?
Your art needs to be the focus. Just keep writing. Keep constantly playing music. All of the promo and stuff, save that for when people are making you do it. It's the worst part. ®

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National Affairs

MAGA Law: How the Trump Judges Twist U.S. Justice

They're overwhelmingly young, white, male, and extreme. And they'll be in power for a generation

By JAY MICHAELSON

THE HARD RIGHT'S takeover of the Supreme Court is real, and is having real consequences. But despite that leaked decision that would overturn *Roe,* this takeover isn't just about abortion, and it's not just about the Supreme Court. In fact, Trump-appointed judges at all levels of the judiciary are remaking nearly every aspect of American law, from voting rights to environmental regulations, police accountability to LGBTQ and women's equality.

There are also a lot of these judges. In four years, the Trump administration put a record 226 life-tenure federal judges on the bench. And while these judges don't make the headlines like the Supreme Court does, they are already transforming our country, a little bit at a time.

Perhaps most important, they will be there many, many years. Because Trump's minions chose the youngest cohort of judges in recorded history, some of these people are in their thirties and forties. That means they could still be on the bench in 40, even 50 years – if climate change hasn't flooded their courtrooms by then.

SO, WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

Well, for a start, they're 84 percent white and 76 percent male, well out of proportion to the population, which is 58 percent non-Hispanic white, and 50 percent male. (At the appellate-court level, the slant is even greater: 43 of Trump's 54 appointees are men.) Keep that in mind the next time a court decides something about women's rights to control their bodies.

And they were, statistically speaking, remarkably less qualified than usual. In four years of Trump, the nonpartisan, nonpolitical American Bar Association rated 10 of his nominees as "not qualified," something they'd done only 12 times in the previous 27 years. (True to form, Republicans have attacked the American Bar Association itself.)

Now, to be sure, many Trump-appointed judges are solid jurists – with very conservative résumés, but with solid reputations as well. But many others are not.

"The plan was to put on as many folks who have an extreme ideology as possible," says Lena Zwarensteyn, senior director of the Fair Courts Program of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. "This is a very long-term project that a very narrow extreme group has had, largely in response to the civil rights movement integrating communities and schools. It is a systemic plan to roll back progress we have made on civil and human rights."

IMAGES IN ILLUSTRATION BY THORSTEN NILSON/EYEEM/GETTY IMAGES; STEFANI REYNOLDS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GLADWELL/GETTY IMAGES; OLIVIER DOULIERY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

And this is all according to plan. Trump's judges were vetted, and in some cases selected, by the Federalist Society and other hard-right groups dominated by religious extremists with the overt intention of turning the clock back on civil rights of all kinds. (Many of those extremists are now judges themselves.) The goal? "I would love to see the courts unrecognizable," said the Federalist Society's co-chairman, Leonard Leo, in May 2017.

That has now happened. As Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse described (visual aids and all) at Justice Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation hearing, Leo's network found and supported conservative law students, educated them in hard-right ideology, and helped them find jobs in think tanks, government, and the courts.

The thing to understand here is that while big cases like *Dobbs* and *Roe* come along once every few years, every day there are incremental cases that either bolster or erode our civil rights. Just as progress is gained one small step at a time, it is lost the same way. The advance of Christian nationalism is a steady drip-drip-drip, eroding rights a little bit at a time, by judges we don't hear much about until it is too late.

A look at the worst MAGA judges and their rulings reveals a record of extreme ideology and irrational jurisprudence that has very little to do with the rule of law.

JUDGE

Kathryn Kimball Mizelle

JUDGE KATHRYN Kimball Mizelle is now famous for her truly incompetent opinion overturning the CDC's masking rule for airplanes in April. Whatever you think of that rule, Mizelle's opinion was flagrantly wrong, while dabbling in ignorant anti-mask/anti-vax rhetoric of the type you'd hear on Fox News.

How wrong? Amazingly, it all came down to one word: "sanitation." When that word was used in the 1944 law that authorized the Centers for Disease Control to, you know, control disease, it had a broad meaning that encompassed any public-health measures needed to curb the spread of a disease.

But Judge Mizelle, whose understanding of historical dictionaries is extremely limited, said it only means cleaning something up. Which masks don't do. And so, one judge wiped out the entire country's pandemic rules.

In an interview with NPR, Erin Fuse Brown, a law professor at Georgia State University, said, "If one of my students turned in this opinion as their final exam, I don't know if I would agree that they had gotten the analysis correct.... It reads like someone who had decided the case and then tried to dress it up as legal reasoning without actually doing the legal reasoning."

Given that performance, it's no surprise that when Judge Mizelle was nominated, she was rated "not qualified" by the ABA. But Mizelle's opinion isn't simply wrong; it's wrong in a particular, ideologically driven way. Which is exactly why she was put in her current position.

JUDGE

Matthew Kacsmaryk

DISTRICT JUDGE Matthew Kacsmaryk is like the immigration version of Judge Mizelle: With the stroke of a misguided pen, he changed federal policy to align with his ideological preferences.

Unlike Mizelle's, Kacsmaryk's record was shocking when it was presented to the Senate. For example, a 2015 article mocking same-sex marriage and arguing that the sexual revolution "sought public affirmation of the lie that the human person is an autonomous blob of Silly Putty unconstrained by nature or biology, and that marriage, sexuality, gender identity, and even the unborn child must yield to the erotic desires of liberated adults."

Which is funny, since I totally don't remember reading that in my law-school class on women's and LGBTQ rights, which are actually grounded in the equality and dignity of all human beings and the limits on governmental power to make their most profound intimate decisions for them. I guess I slept in that day.

But it's in the area of immigration where Kacsmaryk has made his greatest impact.

Last year, Kacsmaryk ordered the Biden administration to return to the Trump-era policy known as "Remain in Mexico," where migrants applying for asylum must stay in Mexico while their case is pending. It's now well-known how cruel this policy is: It's caused families to be torn apart and victims of violence to be left vulnerable and defenseless.

But Kacsmaryk didn't just ignore these humanitarian concerns. As even the conservative justices of the Supreme Court noted in April during their review of the case, he also completely twisted federal immigration law in such a way that even Trump's policies were too lenient. Which is impressive, really.

Where the law actually gives government officials four options for dealing with people seeking asylum – mandatory detention, return to a contiguous territory, parole for humanitarian reasons, and release on a cash bond – Kacsmaryk simply ignored the last two of them. So, he said, everyone had to either be put into detention or be sent to Mexico. Which no administration has ever done, because it is both cruel and impractical. But which, again, is in line with why Kacsmaryk was put on the bench to begin with: to transform not just immigration law but also the rule of law itself.

JUDGE

Stuart Kyle Duncan

LIKE KACSMARYK, Fifth Circuit appellate judge Stuart Kyle Duncan had a prolific anti-LGBTQ résumé, having worked as a professional activist for several years. He defended Louisiana's ban on same-sex marriage, defended Alabama's right to take away a woman's parental rights because she was a lesbian, defended Louisiana refusing to issue a birth certificate to same-sex parents, and worked on a number of anti-trans cases, arguing in court that trans people are merely delusional and that teenage boys might simply want to "[opt] onto female [sports] teams."

Now he's a judge for life.

Two years ago, Duncan authored one of the most bizarre and cruel federal-court opinions in recent memory. After dismissing a trans woman's request to change her name on her judgment of confinement to accord with her legally changed name, Kathrine Nicole Jett, he spent five pages referring to Jett by her no-longer-valid "dead name" and explaining why he would not even use female pronouns to refer to her in court. Amazingly, he said that to use female pronouns "could raise delicate questions about judicial impartiality" (as if using male pronouns does not), and while doing so might be a "courtesy," there's no law that requires it, so why be courteous? Or respectful? Or kind?

JUDGE

John Bush

PRIOR TO HIS nomination, John Bush (under his blogger pseudonym "G. Morris") wrote that "the two greatest tragedies in our country – slavery and abortion – relied on similar reasoning and activist justices at the U.S. Supreme Court, first in the *Dred Scott* decision, and later in *Roe*." (He also repeated "birther" claims about President Obama.)

Believe it or not, Christian-right folks make this analogy all the time: Ronald Reagan said in 1984 that *Roe* "is not the first time our country has been divided by a Supreme Court decision that denied the value of certain human lives. The *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 [which upheld slavery] was not overturned in a day, or a year, or even a decade."

FROM TOP: C-SPAN; FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE; U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT; BINGHAM GREENEBAUM DOLL LLP

A PROTEST RALLY FOR ABORTION RIGHTS AT THE SUPREME COURT

FROM TOP: MARK PETERSON/REDUX; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

That's right: Embryos and fetuses are just like enslaved human beings.

So it should come as no surprise that, when the issue of abortion came before him in 2019, Judge Bush wrote an opinion repeatedly referring to a fetus as "unborn life" (so much for certain words raising questions of impartiality), and upholding a law that required transvaginal probes even for pregnancies under nine weeks and forced doctors to describe the fetus' organs, even in cases of rape, incest, and when the fetus or the mother would not survive.

JUDGE

Patrick Bumatay

OFTEN, SOME OF the worst erosions of civil rights take place under the cover of obscure doctrines that only lawyers know about. For example, police misconduct is often enabled by the doctrine of "qualified immunity," which shields bad cops from accountability by requiring that their conduct violate "clearly established law" to be prosecuted. So, when a white cop kneels on the neck of a Black man, the question is not "How in the world could this possibly be OK?" but rather "Was there a clearly established law that this officer knowingly violated?"

Usually, the answer to that question is no, since laws and court cases can't anticipate every possible situation in advance, and so the cops get off.

Last November, for example, two judges, including Trump appointee Judge Patrick Bumatay, applied that doctrine to let off a cop who failed to get a young Black woman medical help while she was in his custody. After arresting Aleah Jenkins at a traffic stop outside San Diego, the officer began driving her to police headquarters, an hour away. Along the way, according to bodycam footage, Jenkins vomited repeatedly, groaned, and screamed for help, before falling silent for 10 minutes, her body twitching and shaking. When they finally made it to the police station, the officer didn't ask for medical help or use the Narcan he had in his trunk, but instead fingerprinted her while she lay on the ground, and then put her back into the car. When he checked on her 11 minutes later, she was unconscious, having fallen into a coma. Nine days later, she was dead.

But because there was no previous case that "clearly established" that the officer's behavior was unreasonable, the case was dismissed.

This case didn't make any national headlines. But it, and others like it, have empowered irresponsible police officers, who know they can do anything they want as long as there's no "clearly established" rule governing the exact circumstances of their case.

"It's often invisible as to why something cruel is happening to people," Zwarensteyn tells me. "Yet courts impact people's lives day in and day out."

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

Now, there is a way this story can still turn out well: if overturning *Roe v. Wade* wakes up enough people to, as the saying goes, "vote the Republican bastards out."

Remember, the conservative takeover of the judiciary has happened away from the limelight: the extremist judges, the drip-drip-drip erosion of civil rights, all of it. But *Roe v. Wade* is a lot of limelight. Will it motivate people to turn out in the record numbers needed to defend our rights and our democracy? After all, if Democrats had won just a few more Senate seats in 2020, we'd likely have a national abortion-rights law on the books, not to mention a real infrastructure bill and the most aggressive action against climate change in American history.

There are two things needed for that to happen, though.

First, remember that the rules are tilted in Republicans' favor, starting with the institutions of the Senate and Electoral College, which were set up to preserve white supremacy and are doing so spectacularly today.

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Moreover, the same judges taking away women's and LGBTQ rights are also making it much harder to vote – especially if you're Black or brown. At the Supreme Court level, the court's six conservatives devastated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act in last year's case of *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*. Not only did the court allow Arizona's new voting restrictions – which it admitted disproportionately impacted Black voters – but it also said that such restrictions were totally fine unless individual voters could prove that they, personally, faced a heavy burden in meeting the new requirement. This will make it almost impossible to challenge any state's voting restrictions, and not surprisingly, red-state lawmakers have rushed to put them in place since.

A similar case was decided last July, when an appeals court with four Trump judges sitting on it affirmed an Alabama voter-ID law, even though everyone agreed that Black voters were twice as likely as white voters to lack a voter ID that the state considered acceptable. Just pause to reflect on that: A Jim Crow law is passed, everyone agrees that it will affect Black voters more than white voters, yet courts allow it to stand.

All this means that progressives have to fight an uphill battle. It's not enough to simply vote. Progressives have to help other people vote, especially marginalized people. We have to give our time, money, and attention.

And that requires the second thing that has to happen: Not letting the bastards drag you down.

"You can despair for a moment, but not for a long time," says Zwarensteyn. "Remember, how we got here was based on decades of work. Our opportunity to change course and to pursue equal justice for all is not a short-term project."

That means building momentum, getting involved in grassroots organizations and campaigns, and remembering what's at stake. Despair is easy; resilience is power.

It also means getting over the many disappointments of the past two years and remembering that progress can and has been made, especially when it comes to these lifetime federal judges. "This administration has prioritized judges with a demonstrated conviction to civil rights and who look like all our communities," Zwarensteyn says. "They've appointed 60 lifetime judges, a remarkable rate."

The Democrats are far from perfect, but there's no comparison between them and Republicans, especially when it comes to judges and the courts. "Right now," Zwarensteyn continues, "we have numerous incredible nominees pending. Talk to your senators so those judges get confirmed. People felt a sense of victory when Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson was confirmed, and she is the embodiment of many nominees and judges we are seeing. We need to make sure they are on the bench ASAP."

Ultimately, says Zwarensteyn, "it's been a long campaign from the other side, but they are counting on us losing hope. We need to be standing up for one another and not backing down." ®

The End of Roe
How Did We Get Here?

The end of 'Roe. v. Wade' is imminent. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito has authored a draft opinion overturning the right-to-privacy ruling, and four other conservative justices have reportedly voted to support it. When they do, they'll have unleashed a flood of radical anti-choice laws. Here's how they did it.

ABORTION IS AS OLD AS SEX, but it was not usually something governments cared about. In the United States, early-term abortion was legal and unregulated until the 1870s. After nearly a century of horrifying back-alley abortions, the procedure began to be legalized in some states in the 1960s, under pressure from the nascent women's rights movement. Gradually, abortion came to be seen as part of every woman's right to her own bodily autonomy, and in 1973, *Roe v. Wade* was decided.

At first, *Roe v. Wade* was not nearly as important as it would later become. Many Catholics opposed it, but at the time it was decided, most Protestants said that abortions should be legal, and evangelical preachers taught that life began at birth. The Southern Baptist Convention — now a pillar of the conservative "Christian right" — specifically endorsed that view.

What happened? Evangelicals began to get into politics…because of desegregation. When public schools were desegregated in the 1950s, white evangelicals and even some Catholics left them in droves, the evangelicals especially sending their kids to so-called segregation academies, religious schools that admitted only white people. (Jerry Falwell ran one.) At the same time as *Roe* was being argued, those academies were found to be illegal, even though white Christians protested that their religious beliefs compelled them to keep the races separated.

Conservative evangelicals had tended to avoid the mess of politics, and rarely agreed with one another. But with courts forcing white Christians to go to school with Black kids, that changed, and in the late 1970s, the Christian right was born. Yet there was a problem: Preserving segregation was no longer an effective unifying issue. And so, Paul Weyrich, Falwell, and other founders of the Christian right seized on abortion instead.

Abortion was perfect. Support for abortion overlapped with support for desegregation, women's rights, gay rights, and the sexual revolution. If you fought one, you could fight the others too. Plus, abortion was an emotional issue that was easily used to whip up anger and indignation, as well as to drive people to the polls (and to donate money).

The gambit worked. The Christian right helped get Ronald Reagan elected in 1980, and since then, opposition to abortion has been a defining issue of the Republican Party. And for the past 45 years, the Christian right has been methodically, meticulously planning for this very moment. Christian fundamentalists only supported politicians who were "pro-life," driving moderate Republicans out of the party. They made being pro-life central to their religious identity. Despite the obvious history, and the total lack of biblical support, they made "life begins at conception" into dogma.

And they worked to transform the judiciary. Judges and justices began to be vetted for their stances on abortion rights, usually in code. With a newly minted philosophy called "originalism," legal scholars and judges said that only rights that were part of our "nation's history and tradition" were covered by the Constitution's guarantees. No one believed this preposterous idea 50 years ago, but now five Supreme Court justices do.

Since 1992, Republicans have won the popular vote in a presidential election exactly once, but through both accidents of timing and incidents of stunning hypocrisy — most obviously when Sen. Mitch McConnell refused to consider President Obama's election-year nomination to replace Antonin Scalia, but then rushed to confirm Amy Coney Barrett to replace Ruth Bader Ginsburg weeks before the 2020 election — six of the nine current justices were appointed by Republican presidents.

The fruits of this judicial takeover are Justices Barrett, Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, and Brett Kavanaugh. Every one of them was promoted by the same right-wing network, and every one of them was put on the court for one purpose: to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. J.M.

RS REPORTS

The Satanist Neo-Nazi Plot to Murder U.S. Soldiers

A rogue G.I.'s trial exposes the depths of a murderous far-right ideology – and the FBI's complicity in spreading hate

By ALI WINSTON

ETHAN PHELAN MELZER'S secret life of hate ran deep. The 24-year-old private in the 173rd Airborne Brigade appeared to be just another young soldier, trying to find his way through military life at Fort Benning, Georgia. However, in his private time, prosecutors allege, Melzer had another, sinister side: He said he liked to perform macabre blood rituals; read obscure, gruesome tracts about torture and child abuse; collected violent iconography; and found like minds in the depths of Telegram, an encrypted messaging app so favored by extremists of all stripes that it is often referred to as "Terrorgram." His handle was "Etil Reggad" – a near anadrome for "Elite Dagger."

By Melzer's own account, enlisting in the Army was a ruse – on the encrypted app, he wrote that he had joined up solely to gain knowledge of military weaponry and tactics. "It's great for training," he wrote, adding a cryptic remark about his base. "All of these places the vast majority deserve to be burned."

Melzer repeatedly trash-talked the Army and described it as merely a means to hone his violent skills. "I'm not patriotic for shit," he wrote to another radical who was considering enlisting in the Marines. Telegram chats disclosed by the government in court filings reveal his efforts to mask his true beliefs: "I fly under the radar already, act completely normal around other people outside and don't talk about my personal life or beliefs with anyone."

The young paratrooper said he was conducting what he called an "insight role" – both infiltrating and subverting an institution, one of the core tenets of the Order of Nine Angles, a secretive, nihilistic, bloodthirsty satanist-Nazi sect, to which, prosecutors allege, Melzer swore allegiance.

Once confined to the most obscure occultism, "O9A" ideology has spread like wildfire via the internet and the global fascist resurgence of the 2010s. Its cells, known as "nexions," have cross-pollinated with the millenarian neo-Nazi worldview popularized by the wannabe 21st-century Tim McVeighs of the Atomwaffen Division, a group of American extremists who celebrated the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, venerated terrorists like Anders Breivik and psychopaths like Charles Manson, and have been connected to five murders and numerous bomb plots.

The key evangelical for O9A, the figure who facilitated this macabre wedding of apocalyptic death cults, is Joshua Caleb Sutter, a 41-year-old ex-convict, prolific satanist, publisher of manuscripts advocating murder, torture, rape, and child abuse – and a paid FBI informant since 2004.

Sutter's O9A message is a lunatic mashup of vampirism, Columbine-style death worship, and edgelord posturing, specifically designed to lure in the lost, angry, and transgressive types like Melzer.

Indeed, for his part, Melzer's indoctrination seemed complete. "Fascism is more the law of nature than anything, [its] worldview is that by causing absolute chaos, anarchy, whatever you want to call it, the law of nature will naturally take over once again," Melzer wrote on a Telegram channel devoted to satanism.

In spring 2020, Melzer learned of the 173rd Airborne Brigade's upcoming deployment from Camp Ederle in Vicenza, Italy, to a base in Turkey. Prosecutors allege that Melzer passed on highly classified details of his unit's forthcoming assignment to fellow satanists on Telegram, and to a person he believed was a member of Al Qaeda. The intelligence was sent with the intent of having the 173rd ambushed by terrorists and triggering a "mascal" – military speak for a "mass casualty" event, prosecutors say.

In the back and forth over a number of days in May 2020, according to the evidence presented by federal prosecutors, Melzer and his alleged Al Qaeda and satanist co-conspirators discussed the location of the base, the precise number of personnel stationed there, and the unit's defensive capabilities. Melzer also allegedly shared satellite images of the outpost's layout. The proposed carnage apparently didn't bother Melzer in the least. In fact, he reveled in the potential fallout from a massacre of American soldiers by jihadis, even if that meant losing his own life.

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FIGURE IN ILLUSTRATION BASED ON A PHOTO BY LENNART PREISS/GETTY IMAGES

"Another 10 year war in the Middle East would definitely leave a mark," Melzer messaged a fellow satanist. "I would've died successfully."

PVT. MELZER was arrested by military investigators at the American military base in Vicenza on May 30, 2020, right before the 173rd Airborne's expected deployment to Turkey. The young soldier was branded "the enemy within" by the United States attorney for the Southern District of New York, when his indictment was made public on June 22, 2020. Melzer has pleaded not guilty to all charges, and his trial is expected to start on July 5. His attorneys declined requests for comment.

This piece is the result of years of reporting on the extreme right, and dozens of conversations with former undercover agents, ex-militants, extremism experts, and hundreds of pages of court documents as well as neo-Nazi and satanist propaganda from criminal cases in both the United States and United Kingdom. That the sadistic ideology is dangerous, few would argue. The Order of Nine Angles already has a body count overseas, and a rising number of terrorism convictions involving young, troubled, impressionable men. But, critics say, this is a crisis the FBI helped create.

In Pvt. Melzer's case, the American military allegedly came close to suffering a homegrown attack, which would have been the ultimate blowback of an 18-year undercover-informant operation. Joshua Sutter's role as the chief American proselytizer of Melzer's satanic ideology is complicated by the fact that Sutter was also enjoying life on the FBI payroll, while publishing thousands of words of blood-curdling propaganda that radicalized a growing movement of dangerous extremists.

"If you're giving $140,000 to a guy you recruited, and to not check in on the material he's publishing, which promotes murdering children and pedophilia, that's not doing your fucking job," says Jake Hanrahan, an English journalist and founder of the independent media firm Popular Front who has tracked the Order of Nine Angles' growing influence for a decade.

If Melzer's beliefs are a "diabolical cocktail of ideologies," as the Department of Justice alleged, characterizing his beliefs as "neo-Nazi," "anarchist," "pro-jihadist," and "white supremacist," then don't the U.S. government and the FBI have to reckon with their own complicity in allowing the insidious beliefs to fester and spread?

THE LINEAGE of Sutter and Melzer's hate is documented. Allegedly created by octogenarian Englishman David Myatt in the 1970s, and once confined to the most obscure corners of occultism, O9A ideology has expanded in the internet age. Myatt was a key figure in the English far right and was heavily involved in the militant skinhead organization Combat 18 in the 1980s and 1990s. Over the years, his writings have been highly influential within extremist circles: Myatt's pamphlet "A Practical Guide to Aryan Revolution" is classified as a terrorist manual by the British government, and his writings were found in the possession of David Copeland, who set off a series of nail bombs targeting London's Black, South Asian, and LGBTQ communities in 1999, and Germany's National Socialist Underground, which assassinated nine people of Turkish, Greek, and Kurdish heritage and a police officer between 2000 and 2007.

Adherents to the Order of Nine Angles strive for the downfall of Western civilization. In order to accelerate that collapse, they seek to sow chaos, death, and destruction wherever possible. Deception, murder, violence, sexual assault, and fraud are all deemed acceptable methods in O9A texts. While firm numbers on O9A disciples are hard to come by, occult researchers estimate there are roughly 2,000 adherents scattered around the world, with hardcore members identified in the United States, Great Britain, Italy, Moldova, Russia, Australia, and elsewhere.

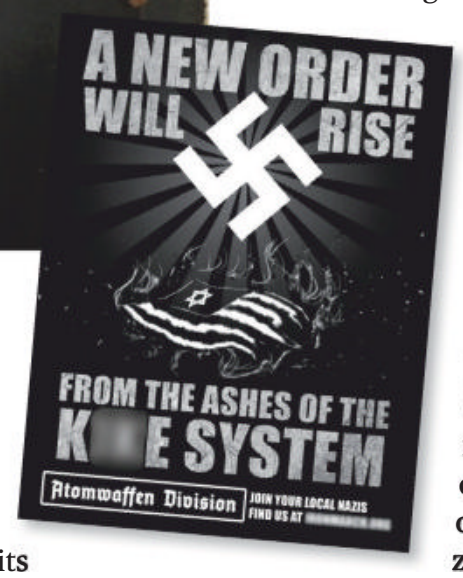
"The popularity of the Order of Nine Angles has exploded as it's

gotten picked up in these Atomwaffen-esque far-right circles," says Spencer Sunshine, a longtime researcher of the far right who is writing a book about James Mason, the author of *Siege,* Atomwaffen's ideological lodestar. "Clearly, there's a big turn toward the occult, satanism. Sometimes it's more present in the propaganda and discourse than the white nationalist, racist politics – anything to overthrow the system – that's why all the serial killers, massacres, and so on."

The Telegram channel where Melzer contacted his other O9A adherents was one of the most poisonous channels on Terrorgram: RapeWaffen, which the founder (dubiously) claimed was a splinter group of the Atomwaffen Division. The channel promoted bloodshed and the need to dehumanize, sharing videos of women being sexually assaulted, murder, and extreme violence. RapeWaffen's alleged founder, who went by the moniker "Sinisterius," openly called for "culling," the practice of human sacrifice that is one of O9A's darkest features. Channel members were assigned a reading list, including *Iron Gates*, *Liber 333*, and *Bluebird* – books authored by an American O9A "nexion," called the Tempel ov Blood, and distributed by Martinet Press, a publishing house run by Sutter.

O9A is elastic in its death mythos, weaving together different elements of fascism and various world religions. "The real thing is that these attacks and mass shootings are nothing but Kalki doing an ethic and ethnic cleansing on the world," Sinisterius wrote in one 2019 post, referring to a Hindu deity often cited in O9A and praising recent mass killings by right-wing militants. "When we celebrate those attacks, we are celebrating Kalki's Will becoming manifest on this world." Another post says: "Rape also serves like a magick practice that make [sic] you attain a higher conscious state."

At first glimpse, talk of culling and "heil rape" may seem like vile hyperbolic posturing. However, there are real-world examples of such killings by O9A devotees: Guilherme Von Neutegem, a Canadian O9A adherent, is facing murder charges in the killing of a man outside of a Toronto mosque in 2020. In the United Kingdom, two sisters were stabbed to death in a London park in June 2020 by a young man who, under the influence of a Utah O9A proselytizer, claimed to have made a pact with a demon that required him to spill blood. There have been a number of other terrorism prosecutions and convictions in Great Britain linked by law enforcement to the Order of Nine Angles, and Parliament has been lobbied to ban the satanic cult as a domestic terror group.



RESIDENT EVIL: WHERE FASCISM AND SATANISM MEET
Top: Order of Nine Angles paraphernalia presented in Melzer's case. Above: Sutter (far right) with members of the Atomwaffen Division. Inset: A hate screed published by Atomwaffen.

That's where the appeal of the Order of Nine Angles, with its emphasis on torture, degradation, blood rituals, and human sacrifice, comes in. "Putting out the most extreme content you can find makes you tough, makes you scary, makes you edgy in this world now," Lowles says. In particular, he points out the haunting, almost indecipherable videos, grating industrial music, and shocking texts churned out by Sutter's American Tempel ov Blood nexion. Sutter's twisted online sermons, Lowles says, epitomized the aesthetic that would give young extremists credibility and heft in the wildest corners of the digital far right: "That's the appeal of ToB in particular – it was so far beyond anything else out there."

PVT. MELZER is not the first American soldier charged with plotting crimes inspired by satanism. In 2019, Spc. Jarrett William Smith was arrested at Kansas' Fort Riley and charged by prosecutors with distributing explosives manuals; he also reportedly discussed plans to kill anti-fascists and car-bombing a news outlet "for the glory…of his religion of anti-kosmik satanism." In 2019, Smith discussed attacking the headquarters of a major news network with an FBI informant and an undercover agent. Smith pleaded guilty to the charges against him and was sentenced to 30 months in prison; he was released last November on three years' probation. (Smith did not respond to requests for comment.)

What little is known of Melzer's past indicates a man drawn to extremes. In his first post-arrest interview with the Army's Criminal Investigation Division and the FBI, Melzer claimed he'd hung around the wrong crowd at high school in Louisville, Kentucky. "Gang-affiliation-type shit – there was a couple of friends that I hung out with that were Bloods," he claimed, with a markedly different tone from that which he struck as his "Etil Reggad" persona in RapeWaffen, where he claimed to have done an insight role as "a runner for some Bounty Hunter Bloods." Melzer also told the RapeWaffen administrator that he'd done a second insight role "with antifa." It's impossible to verify either claim, though Melzer fits the profile of an adolescent playing with the violent countercultural edges of society. Today, Melzer has virtually no digital footprint, but what can be pieced together about his background suggests an unstable home – his parents separated when he was young, and instead of a secondary education, he enrolled in the Department of Labor's Job Corps program in Kentucky's rural Muhlenberg County.

It was in this program, in 2018, at age 20, that Melzer began his descent into satanism. "In Job Corps [I] got a small following of people and used them for feeding, if we're talking like actual growth wise," Melzer wrote. The government alleges that Melzer's phones contained videos and photographs of the young soldier ritually cutting himself, and a satanist text with its pages drenched in blood was recovered from his barracks. Other O9A adherents, like convicted English neo-Nazi Andrew Dymock, who was charged with 15 counts of terrorism and hate-related crimes. Ryan

TOP: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Fleming, another militant, has been convicted twice and jailed repeatedly for sexually abusing and grooming minors. Fleming, according to reports by the BBC, actively promoted the Order of Nine Angles and published satanic literature through Sutter's Tempel ov Blood cell.

In two interviews with military and federal investigators following his arrest in Italy, Melzer acknowledged downloading and watching the satanist videos and jihadi-propaganda films found on his devices, but claimed his enthusiastic remarks about the lethal violence were "satire or dark humor" meant to impress other members of the RapeWaffen Telegram channel. His defense of the charges seems to be "I did it all for the lulz."

Regardless of motive, nihilism and raw menace lurk at the heart of Melzer's O9A beliefs. "The core of being O9A is truly embodying evil," says Sunshine, the extremist researcher. "[In Melzer's case], the Nazis, the Islamist stuff are just vehicles for that – and let's face it, what could be more evil than killing your own comrades from within their own ranks?"

THE TRUE wild card in the federal prosecution of Melzer, however, is its man on the inside of O9A. In filings last year, prosecutors identified O9A's primary American "affiliate" as the Tempel ov Blood, the South Carolina-based nexion run by Joshua Caleb Sutter, a moribund son of a racist preacher who, since his conviction for purchasing a defaced firearm from an FBI agent in 2003, has been a government informant. Despite his work spreading the word of O9A, Sutter has earned well into the six figures for his assistance in rolling up right-wing extremists across the United States, including the Atomwaffen Division. After his arrest on the gun charges, Sutter began exploring fringe ideologies on polar ends of the spectrum, moving back to a wooded property owned by his parents in Lexington, South Carolina, and becoming deeply involved in a bizarre North Korean organization called the Songun Politics Study Group USA. Sutter transformed himself into that group's main propagandist before migrating to Hindu esotericism with a woman named Jillian Hoy, whom he married.

Through his publishing house, Martinet Press, which he co-founded with Hoy, Sutter is one of the most prolific propagandists for the Order of Nine Angles. In using Sutter as a paid informant while he continues to run his Tempel ov Blood nexion and publishing imprint, the FBI has, in effect, bankrolled one of the most extreme, perverse, and lethal ideologies to emerge from the fever swamp of the internet-driven neo-fascist revival of the early 21st century. (Sutter did not respond to ROLLING STONE's emailed requests for comment.)

"It's shocking," says Lowles of Hope Not Hate, who noted commonalities between Sutter and David Myatt in their use of aggressive far-right militant groups to advance their O9A beliefs – Combat 18 in Myatt's case, Atomwaffen Division in Sutter's. (Myatt has claimed to have renounced extremism in 2013, though many O9A researchers remain skeptical of his supposed change of heart.)

Lowles maintains that by employing Sutter, the distributor and author of texts that promote not only terrorism but also pedophilia, human sacrifice, and child abuse, the FBI has given its informant way too long a leash, and innocents have paid a price.

"In the 21st century, people don't have the *Turner Diaries* anymore, they have *Iron Gates* and *Liber 333*," Lowles says, referring to Tempel ov Blood books published by Sutter. In the opening scene of *Iron Gates*, a desperate post-apocalyptic mob kills and devours a child, a chilling example of this brand of satanism. *Bluebird* dwells on the theme of pedophilia and rape. These are not idle words: Children as young as 14 have been groomed by Tempel ov Blood adherents, who have gone on to be convicted for their offenses, including sexually assaulting minors.

While most people would read such macabre texts and think they were "barking mad," Lowles says that there is a real risk of highly disturbed people taking such messages to heart. "The more you push out their propaganda, the more someone who might be vulnerable, angry, or have a mental illness will say, 'I'm gonna do this.' "

"Using Sutter as a paid informant while he continues to run his Tempel ov Blood cell, the FBI has, in effect, bankrolled one of the most extreme and lethal ideologies of the early 21st century."

Lowles has tracked Sutter's involvement with O9A and direct communications with Myatt as far back as 2004, when Sutter began working as a confidential informant for the FBI. The timing of that contact and Sutter's subsequent trajectory, Lowles says, raises a whole new raft of questions: "What was, if any, the FBI's interest in the satanist stuff? Was Sutter genuinely into this ideology and allowed to be involved in it as long as he spied on what they considered to be the real threats?"

Independent journalist Nate Thayer surfaced communications between Sutter and another satanist wherein Sutter labeled himself "Master of the Tempel," and Hoy the "Blood-Mistress," and outlined his intention to radicalize followers through repeated exposure to lurid material and texts to the point of desensitization. It's the equivalent of creating human IEDS: people who are wired for violence and disconnected enough from morality that they have no compunction about abuse, torture, pedophilia, or any of the other practices outlined in the Tempel ov Blood texts.

"This Tempel is in many ways a social programming experiment," Sutter has written. "While we do create fanatics, we must make the 'fake' adherents entries look as if it is obviously their will and good for them to serve the ToB. It has to be subtle. In the later stages it becomes more overt and at that point is too late for them to change. They become so alienated from humanity that, well, haha, if they tried to go back they will still cause so much disruption."

Over the ensuing years, Sutter used Martinet Press to spread O9A and the Tempel ov Blood in the hidden corners of occultism and extremism. This eventually led to him becoming a member of the Atomwaffen Division under the moniker "swissdiscipline." In spring 2017, he had been contacted by John Cameron Denton, a young Texan fascinated with National Socialist black metal, *Siege,* Charles Manson, and the Order of Nine Angles. According to a former Attomwaffen member who spoke on condition of anonymity, Denton knew of Sutter's reputation in the occult through Tempel ov Blood, and invited him to join the terrorist group.

During Atomwaffen member Kaleb Cole's trial in September 2021, Sutter testified that, on the direction of his FBI handler, Special Agent Bill Moser of the Columbia, South Carolina, field office, Sutter became part of the underground militant group. Sutter participated in at least two of the group's "Hate Camp" trainings near Washington's Mount Rainier and Death Valley in Nevada in August 2017 and early 2018, respectively. At these trainings, the Atomwaffen Division militants marched in the Northwestern woods and the Nevada desert, shot propaganda footage, fired off dozens of rifle rounds, and got plastered while discussing the coming race war and obscure Nazi theory late into the night. In Nevada, Sutter, Cole, and two other Atomwaffen Division members posed for photos outside the Alien Cathouse brothel while giving the *Sieg heil!* salute.

Sutter also attended Atomwaffen's 2019 "Nuclear Congress" gathering in a Las Vegas hotel room with several high-ranking members and James Mason, the author of *Siege*, who urged the creation of a new fascist regime through murder, small "lone wolf" terror attacks, and relentless war against the government. Sutter had remained a free man as law enforcement rolled up his fellow neo-Nazis in 2019 and 2020 during a nationwide series of arrests and prosecutions culminating with a raid on a suburban home in Conroe, Texas, where Denton, Cole, and two other members of the Atomwaffen Division were arrested.

According to the former member of Atomwaffen, Sutter repeatedly visited the house in Conroe and introduced undercover FBI agents into Atomwaffen's inner circle. In the sparsely furnished house, where Nazi flags hung from the walls and electronics littered plastic folding tables, Sutter would speak late into the night with Denton and Cole about operational security and a plot to dox journalists who the group felt had maligned them, the former member says.

Sutter's influence over Atomwaffen Division was apparent soon after he joined: Denton and Cole had taken over leadership of the group from its imprisoned founder, Brandon Russell, who was serving federal prison time for an explosives-possession conviction. Martinet Press titles were introduced as required reading for new recruits.

"He really just acted in the background, through the others, stuff like pushing the O9A sentiments, the books like *Iron Gates*," says the ex-Atomwaffen Division member who left the group years ago and has renounced his former beliefs. In late 2017, Atomwaffen's propaganda [*Cont. on 78*]

All-American Extremism

With an array of hate groups forming in recent years, the threat of far-right violence has never been greater. But not all share the same goals and methods. A guide to the country's most dangerous militants

By TIM DICKINSON

THE FACTIONS of far-right militants in America can seem a jumble of militiamen and revolutionaries, neo-fascists and white supremacists. • While they all share a love of guns and a loathing of liberalism, not all militant groups share the same tactics, aims, or trigger points. How do you differentiate an Oath Keeper militant from a Proud Boy brawler or a Boogaloo Boi from the Patriot Front? We've got you covered. • Below, a survey of some of the most dangerous groups on the right, the objectives they pursue, what makes them unique – and why they fight. "The best way to distinguish between these groups," says Matt Kriner, a senior research scholar at the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counter-terrorism, "is looking at their narratives of justified violence."

Proud Boys

Enrique Tarrio led the Proud Boys before his 2022 arrest for conspiracy.

Founded: In 2016 by Gavin McInnes, who previously helped launch Vice Media. "Proud Boys started as a street-fighter group that wanted to be real-life shitposters," says Kriner. "They wanted to be those edgelords on the street."

Core beliefs: The Proud Boys declare themselves to be "Western chauvinists," which is "a fancy way of saying white supremacists or white nationalists," Kriner argues. Despite surface denials of bigotry, the Proud Boys have acted as a gateway to the alt-right. Kriner describes them as a "vessel to deepen the red redpilling" of disaffected men. They have a hipster aesthetic, testosterone-fetishizing mores (eschewing masturbation, for example), and initiation rituals that make light of violence – e.g., enduring punches until initiates can name five sugar cereals.

The Proud Boys rage against "the left," which they blame for undermining Western society. The Proud Boys take metaphorical culture wars and make them literal: They are street brawlers, often showing up to clash with anti-fascist counterprotesters – particularly in cities in the Pacific Northwest. Differing from militia movements, says Alex Friedfeld, an investigative researcher at the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism, "they're more focused on opposing the left than the federal government."

Approach to violence: Unlike the Oath Keepers and other militias, the Proud Boys don't tie themselves in knots looking for moral or legalistic justifications of violence. "They're fascists," says Kriner. "They're not adhering to a constitutional structure. They're saying, 'We're here to fuck shit up.' "

Key moments: Top Proud Boys face federal charges for storming the Capitol on Jan. 6. Earlier, a prominent Proud Boy, Jason Kessler, helped organize the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. (Kessler was belatedly kicked out of the Proud Boys.) In a 2020 debate, then-President Trump was asked by Joe Biden to disown the Proud Boys. Trump instead told the Proud Boys to "Stand back and stand by," because "somebody's gotta do something about antifa and the left."

Oath Keepers

The Oath Keepers fear the government could turn cities into interment camps.

Founded: In 2009 by Stewart Rhodes, a former Army paratrooper and Yale Law-educated attorney, who lost his eye in a handgun accident. Through the Obama years, the group's membership grew into the tens of thousands.

Core beliefs: The Oath Keepers tout themselves as guardians of the constitutional order against what they perceive as encroaching federal tyranny. They recruit heavily among veterans and law-enforcement personnel, appealing to their vow to protect the country against "all enemies foreign and domestic."

The organization is "very conspiratorial in their outlook," says Kriner. Its multipart oath includes fever-dream promises to defend cities from being turned into interment camps. "We will *not* obey any order to detain American citizens as 'unlawful enemy combatants,' " reads another, "or to subject them to trial by military tribunal."

Approach to violence: On a surface level, the Oath Keepers orientation is defensive, even as many members spoil for a fight. "They're going to try to look for moral high ground," Kriner says, "and say 'We were pushed to a point that we no longer could avoid violence.' "

Prominent adherents: A leaked roster of 38,000 Oath Keepers revealed that many sheriffs, police officers, and even some elected officials signed up for the group.

Key moments: Oath Keepers showed up in force at the 2014 standoff at Bundy Ranch in southern Nevada, in defense of a notorious anti-government cattleman who refused to pay federal grazing fees. They also manned rooftops during the Ferguson uprising in Missouri in 2014, purporting to protect property owners from looters.

Jan. 6 connection: Many Oath Keepers have been charged for storming the Capitol in tactical gear to disrupt the count by the Electoral College. Rhodes and nearly a dozen other Oath Keepers have been charged with seditious conspiracy to block the peaceful transfer of power by force. These Oath Keepers allegedly stockpiled weapons across the river in Virginia on Jan. 6 – eager for Donald Trump to invoke the Insurrection Act and call them into a "bloody" battle against the president's enemies.

Boogaloo Bois

Born out of meme culture, the Boogaloo Bois want a second civil war.

Founded: The Boogaloo movement formed in far-right online platforms like 4chan over the past decade – spreading through memes and shitposting – before spilling into real-life protests and acts of violence, beginning around 2020.

Core beliefs: The Boogaloo name derives from a much-memed movie sequel – *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*. The militants seek their own sequel, a new civil war, shorthanded as the 'Boogaloo,' which is seen as both imminent and necessary.

The Boogaloo Bois are decentralized and leaderless, and the ideology – while centered on violent revolution – is not fixed. Some Bois are avowed white supremacists seeking to build a white ethnostate. Others are more anarchic in their orientation, wanting to distribute power to a heavily armed populace.

The Boogaloo arose, in part, as a reaction to traditional militias aligning themselves with the Trump administration – "a place for purists who think the militia movement sold out," says Friedfeld. Boogaloo Bois win converts with irony and dark humor. But the goofy iconography – a revolutionary flag with a big igloo – and the movement's de facto uniform, Hawaiian shirts, obscure their violent agenda. Unlike the Oath Keepers, who revere law enforcement, Boogaloo Bois are hostile to police: Boogaloo culture refers to a Big Luau (a rough homonym for "Boogaloo") that unmistakably includes roasting "pigs."

Approach to violence: Unabashedly offensive. "They believe the threshold of violence has already been crossed," says Kriner. "Violence underpins everything that they do," adds Friedfeld. "The concept is literally based around a future civil war." Individual Boogaloo Bois have been linked to a raft of violent plots, including allegedly scheming to firebomb a power station, incite riots, possess machine guns, and toss Molotov cocktails at cops.

Key moments: A militant who pleaded guilty to federal charges in the plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer imagined that the act would jump-start the Boogaloo. One self-styled "Boojahideen" was sentenced to 36 months in prison in March for conspiring to provide material support to the militant group Hamas.

Patriot Front

Founded after Charlottesville, Patriot Front adopts blood-and-soil rhetoric.

Founded: By Thomas Rousseau, a former Boy Scout and Trump superfan, in 2017, after he attended the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Core beliefs: Patriot Front is a hate group that revives Italian fascist symbols and Nazi slogans like "blood and soil," but it projects itself under a red-white-and-blue banner of "extreme patriotism," says Friedfeld. Where the Proud Boys target men in their twenties and thirties, Patriot Front recruits disaffected teenagers. Its recruits dress like preppy storm troopers, in khakis, blue windbreakers, baseball caps, and white neck gaiters pulled up to their sunglasses. They show up in flash mobs and use graffiti, defacing public murals celebrating diversity or LGBTQ pride.

The group taps into the America First imagery of the modern right, but Kriner insists that just below the surface, "it's deeply fascistic, deeply anti-Semitic, very racist, and they don't hide it." (The group's website venerates racist and bigoted Americans like Robert E. Lee, Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and Andrew Jackson.) Yet the overly patriotic trappings "give people a comfortable platform from which to then jump into the broader pool of extremity," Kriner says.

Approach to violence: Lots of bark, little bite. Patriot Front's direct actions and propaganda are designed to intimidate, but the group is not known for overt violence. "Here are a bunch of teenagers who've had pretty easy lives," Kriner says. "The moment they're confronted, they tend to run away."

Key moments: In July 2021, Patriot Front defaced a Portland, Oregon, mural honoring George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. It was far from an isolated incident. Of nearly 5,000 public hate markings cataloged by the ADL in 2021, Patriot Front was responsible for 82 percent. "They're incredibly active in plastering towns with posters and graffiti that lean into the patriot side of the ideology – but direct interested parties to their white-supremacy resources," Friedfeld says. "If you're not repelled and they have your attention, that's where they can start to peel people off into their ranks."

Atomwaffen

An Atomwaffen hate camp

Founded: Atomwaffen Division, also known as the Nationalist Socialist Order, announced its launch in 2015 on a then-prominent neo-Nazi website called Iron March. The group pledged to move beyond "keyboard warriorism" in pursuit of "ultimate uncompromising victory." The name Atomwaffen is German for "atomic weapons," and also a play on words; the Waffen were a feared division of Hitler's SS. Atomwaffen is small but has spread internationally.

Core beliefs: These are literal Nazis, declaring: "National Socialism is the only solution to reclaim dominion over what belongs to us." Many white-supremacist groups attempt to sugarcoat their noxious beliefs to redpill new recruits, but Atomwaffen is for hardened haters. (They're also trolls, known for plastering campuses with stickers like "Join Your Local Nazis.")

Members of Atomwaffen are students of American neo-Nazi James Mason, who was a follower of Charles Manson, who touted a white-on-Black race war (and whom Mason wanted to make the American Hitler). They believe that democratic society is irredeemable and a race war should be accelerated to destroy the "Jewish oligarchies and the globalist bankers" responsible for what they call the "racial displacement . . . of the white race."

Approach to violence: Terroristic. Atomwaffen idolizes mass murderers like Manson, Dylann Roof, and Timothy McVeigh, and models itself after Al Qaeda. The group seeks to operate in small cells and has been tied to murders, bomb plots, and other conspiracies.

Prominent adherents: ROLLING STONE profiled 21-year-old founder Brandon Russell and fellow Atomwaffen member Devon Arthurs after Arthurs allegedly murdered the duo's other two roommates. Russell was sentenced to five years on federal charges for possessing bomb-making equipment. Arthurs, in and out of mental hospitals, has so far been judged unfit for trial.

Key moments: The Atomwaffen have a knack for getting arrested. In March 2020, shortly after the feds arrested five Atomwaffen on conspiracy charges, Mason declared that the group had disbanded. But it seems to have merely splintered, with many cells going underground.

THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT: STEPHANIE KEITH/GETTY IMAGES; ROBERT NICKELSBERG/GETTY IMAGES; SANDY HUFFAKER/GETTY IMAGES; KENT NISHIMURA/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

블랙핑크

BLACKPINK

From Strangers to Sisters to Pop Supernovas

By Haeryun Kang

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Peter Ash Lee

스타덤 정상 로제

IN AN OTHERWISE ORDINARY Seoul neighborhood, the headquarters of YG Entertainment rise like a giant spaceship above the Han River. YG is one of South Korea's largest entertainment agencies, producing international K-pop stars, as well as, more recently, actors and models. Opened in 2020, its new complex extends nine stories aboveground and five below. The upper floors are brightly lit and open: meeting rooms with huge windows, an employee cafeteria, even a pho restaurant. Hundreds of YG employees walk busily about. There are screens everywhere, showcasing YG's huge roster.

The underground floors feel more like a secret den: This is where artists practice in dance studios, record music, and trainees mingle with the stars. And it's where Blackpink, the world's most popular girl group, are recording songs for their next album, their first since the early days of the pandemic. Once the album (due sometime later this year) is complete, the flurry of activity will start again, giving the YG employees something new to buzz about and sending the lives of the group's four members – Jennie, Jisoo, Lisa, and Rosé – into overdrive.

Jennie, who like her bandmates on this April afternoon is dressed down and wearing very little makeup, takes a deep breath before describing what's ahead. "These days . . . I think every day, 'OK, how do I prepare myself for my next busy two years?'" she says, alternating between Korean and English. After the interview, she'll hop on a flight to attend Coachella and stop by the L.A. flagship store for the eyewear brand Gentle Monster. She's an ambassador for the brand, as well as Chanel. The other three members have similar gigs, for the likes of Celine (Lisa), Saint Laurent (Rosé), Dior (Jisoo), and more. Just earlier this year, all four were gallivanting around Paris, with front-row seats at fashion week.

Blackpink are one of the most popular artists to ever come out of South Korea. They're the most-followed music act on YouTube; on the streets of Seoul, you see them everywhere, from tiny screens in elevators to billboards on skyscrapers. Even the South Korean president has credited the group, among other cultural exports, for "giving hope and happiness to many around the world." In the U.S., Blackpink have filled arenas and collaborated with stars like Lady Gaga and Cardi B. "From the management and business side, we did have our view and vision to the States and outside of Asia," says Daniel Hong, the CEO of YG's U.S. branch. "Who doesn't want to perform in the States?"

Their last LP, called simply *The Album,* sold around 1.2 million copies in less than a month after its 2020 release, making Blackpink the first million-selling K-pop girl group. In the first quarter of 2021, YG reported an 84 percent jump in revenue over the previous year, largely thanks to Blackpink. Their massive success is part of the Korean Wave, which refers loosely to the global popularity of South Korea's cultural industry.

HAERYUN KANG *is a journalist and filmmaker in Seoul. This is her first story for* ROLLING STONE.

PRODUCED BY KATT KIM AT MOTHER. SET DESIGN BY MINKYU JEON. FASHION DIRECTION BY ALEX BADIA. STYLING BY MINHEE PARK. HAIR BY SUNYOUNG LEE. MAKEUP BY MYUNGSUN LEE.

리사

Lisa

블랙 핑크
BLACKPINK

"I feel proud of them, like I am being loved," says Jeong Yujung, a 23-year-old from Busan, South Korea. Jeong is a Blink, one of the millions of Blackpink fans around the world. "When I see them being photographed or performing with these global stars, I feel proud. Of course, the disadvantage is we don't see them as often in Korea."

Blackpink's music projects an explosive, larger-than-life force that's both invigorating and addictive. They make serious bangers, mixing powerful hip-hop beats with house, EDM, and more. Their videos are filled with bursts of color and inventive dancing, embodying YG's characteristic dedication to "swag" – a term emblazoned in large letters in one of the company's bathrooms – and fiercely independent womanhood. "Rather than emphasizing how cute or feminine they are," Yujung notes, "Blackpink's confidence seems to stem from a certainty about themselves as individuals. Like, 'If you don't like me, you'll regret it! I'm lovable and cool, you just don't know it.'"

In person, Blackpink are more down-to-earth. They're prone to laughter, constantly talking over one another. "My mom and dad are proud of me, but I don't feel like a world star," says Jisoo in Korean, chatting in a conference room and wearing a beige mask she occasionally pulls down to slurp on iced coffee. "I'm the same person that started training in high school. My social standing may have changed, but to me, I'm just . . . too me."

"More than anyone, we want to be ordinary girls," says Jennie. "Sure, there are times when we talk about what kind of influence we could have. But what we actually love is talking about our cats, dogs, good food, and pretty places."

Blackpink come from diverse backgrounds. Lisa (real name: Lalisa Manobal), 25, is from Thailand, a dancer and rapper who spits fierce rhymes in multiple languages. Rosé (Roseanne Chaeyoung Park), also 25, was born in New Zealand and grew up in Australia. She's the guitar-playing, high-note-hitting main vocalist with the "golden voice," as fans love to point out. Twenty-six-year-old Jennie Kim, the group's main rapper, grew up in Seoul and New Zealand, before joining YG in 2010. She's been living in Seoul with her mother for the past year. There's no leader in Blackpink, but sometimes Jennie feels like one, calm and collected, often answering the more difficult questions on behalf of the group. And 27-year-old Jisoo Kim grew up in Gunpo, about 20 miles south of YG headquarters; she's the lead vocalist and an expert harmonizer, both quick-witted and philosophical in interviews.

These days, Blackpink are spending as much of this comparatively quiet time as possible with family and friends. "I feel like I'm recharging myself," says Jisoo. "My life these days is not too busy, because we're not actively performing yet. I want to come back with music quickly. I live alone, but my parents are in the same apartment building, so we share meals together."

로제

Rosé

블랙 핑크
BLACKPINK

Lisa recently returned to Bangkok for the first time in three years, to celebrate her birthday. "My mom and dad are getting old," she says wistfully, speaking in both English and Korean. "Whenever I have time, I want to return to Thailand. I don't want to waste my time. I want to see them as often as I can."

Rosé, who had Covid four weeks ago, apologizes for her dry cough while munching fried rice at that pho restaurant. As a child in Melbourne, she would play piano and guitar and sing until so late that her parents and sister Alice (who all live in Seoul now) had to take turns telling her to stop. She recently picked up her guitar for the first time in ages. In both Korean and English, she talks about recording her voice on an iPad, exploring and playing and experimenting. "I hadn't been doing that for the past two or three months," she says. "Caught up in life. I even told my mom, 'I want to be by myself for the next few days.' So she didn't come over."

Despite their massive success, Blackpink's path wasn't easy. And while cats, dogs, good food, and pretty places are indeed topics of discussion, they are also figuring out larger questions about their music, their individual voices, and who they are.

THE LIFE OF A TRAINEE CAN BE a tough one. "We had the same problems," says Jisoo, "so it was better to talk to each other."

OUTSIDE YG'S BUSTLING HQ, amid mom-and-pop stores, "We wash your cars by hand" signs, and an unmemorable apartment building called "Korea Proud," life is quieter. Cherry blossoms fall like snow over the alleyways of the Hapjeong-dong neighborhood. This area was Blackpink's adolescence. They spent their teenage years as trainees here: living away from their families, singing, rapping, and practicing dance routines for more than 12 hours a day. They were hell-bent on getting to release music and perform in public. "Debut, debut, debut," Lisa says. "That was the only thing on our minds."

"We were on survival mode," says Jennie. "Every month, our friends were forced to leave, go home. Getting stressed? Having it rough? Those feelings were a luxury. What mattered was debuting."

YG Entertainment, founded in 1996, has produced international K-pop hits like BigBang and 2NE1, both precursors to Blackpink. All four members of Blackpink passed auditions to become trainees; all came to YG at different times. Jennie was around the longest, spending six years as a trainee before the group debuted with the singles "Whistle" and "Boombayah" in 2016. Jisoo trained for five years, as did Lisa, who left Bangkok to become a trainee in 2011. Rosé joined in 2012, ranking first among 700 contestants in a YG audition in Sydney. At 15, she left her family and life in Melbourne behind and walked into YG's headquarters carrying the same guitar she still plays today. "That guitar is over 10 years old now," she notes. "It's older than my dog Hank."

That was the day all four girls met, jamming in the YG dormitory kitchen in their pajamas until dawn. Many other trainees would cycle through the project in the years-long process of forming Blackpink, but somehow, fortuitously, the final four members were assigned to the same dorm in those early days. Rosé had just said a teary goodbye to her parents when she met her bandmates. "I think Jennie said, 'Chaeyoung, play something for us!' " remembers Rosé, whose friends call her both Chaeyoung and Rosé (pronounced "Rosie"). "So we sat around the kitchen table with my guitar. Jisoo was great at harmonizing."

"We started out sitting in chairs and then gradually went up onto the table," Lisa says, laughing, during a group interview. "Everyone was like '*Wooooo*.' It was so much fun."

"My seat was facing the kitchen window; I remember the sun rising," says Jisoo.

"Gosh, we're lucky our neighbors didn't complain," giggles Rosé.

"You know, if you'd gone to bed early that day, you might have felt sadder," Jennie tells Rosé thoughtfully.

In that three-bedroom apartment with the white walls faded to ivory, the four girls shared two rooms, while their manager slept in the other one. They played Rock, Paper, Scissors to decide who would use the single bathroom first in the morning.

"Going grocery shopping was so fun," remembers Rosé. "We'd cook together after a long day of training. Nothing spectacular, all frozen stuff. But I still miss the taste of that food."

"I made scrambled eggs with milk," says Jennie.

"And we ate that with strawberry jam," adds Rosé. "It was delicious."

They needed that kind of camaraderie, because the life of a trainee can be demanding. K-pop's trainee systems, inspired by Motown in the U.S. and Johnny's Entertainment in Japan, come under frequent scrutiny. There's no guarantee of ever succeeding, which means trainees can remain in limbo for years. The curriculum differs from agency to agency; at YG, the future Blackpink members underwent a rigorous monthly testing system, where trainees performed solo and in teams for judges, developing everything from their own choreography to styling.

"When was this going to end? Like, when? Do we have to get tested every single month?" says Lisa, who initially didn't speak Korean but is now fluent. "I'd call my mom [in Thailand], wanting to quit, and she'd tell me to hang on just another year, just hang on."

"If I was going through a hard time, I'd go to the bathroom, sob my heart out, then on to the next thing," says Rosé. "I was on autopilot or something. If you told me to do that again, I could never."

In addition to long working hours, there are different restrictions on trainees' lifestyles. Blackpink were forbidden from dating, driving, and drinking, though it's not clear how strictly they followed the rules. Rosé once said on *Radio Star,* a Korean TV show, "These bans were negotiable with the company. They just didn't want us to do them behind their backs."

The members say they received classes devoted to mental health, as well as therapy, but ultimately, they weren't helpful. "We had the same problems, so it was better to talk to each other," says Jisoo.

"We just endured," adds Jennie.

THE DIFFICULT PARTS of Blackpink's journey – and the immensity of their achievements – fade into the background when the members are all together. A few days before we meet at YG, they're all sitting in an unadorned waiting room between photo shoots. (In case you were wondering, the members prefer to have their left side photographed, except Jisoo, who prefers her right.) When Rosé points out the lipstick on Lisa's teeth, the latter grins back with an extra-toothy smile. Jisoo squeals when a mosquito flies her way, while Jennie makes fake nails with empty pistachio shells. They shriek with laughter, reminiscing about the trainee days as the room fills with the noise and warmth of a family kitchen.

Back in their trainee days, the members would sometimes devise schemes to skip practice. One episode revolved around Potato Teacher, a longtime YG choreographer who taught Blackpink to dance. (Potato, whose real name is Kim Hee Jung, got her nickname in elementary school, at a time when, for some reason, it was trendy to refer to your classmates by the names of fruits and vegetables.) "She was considered a legend, so everybody was scared of her," Rosé says.

"But we were dancing literally every single day. Sometimes we really, really wanted to take a break," begins Jisoo. "So one day . . ."

"No, you wouldn't," Lisa shrieks, laughing.

제니
Jennie

지수

Jisoo

"…we took out one of the cables."

"*Arrrrgh!*" Lisa shouts, a feeble, last attempt to protect their secret.

"We took out one of the many cables connected to the speaker, and said, 'Huh? Why isn't the music coming out?' " Jisoo continues, undeterred. "Our class was an hour long. The engineer eventually came and fixed it, within 30 minutes."

"But even those 30 minutes were so precious, so precious," says Jennie.

"We were such a problematic group," Rosé says, cracking up.

"I don't think Potato Teacher knows about this story, to this day," says Jisoo.

BLACKPINK ARE INVOLVED in every step of the creative process, from conceptual brainstorming to final styling. They're co-writers on smashes like "Lovesick Girls" and many others, as well as on their solo singles, some of which are massive hits.

"We don't just receive a completed song," says Jisoo. "We are involved from the beginning, building the blocks, adding this or that feeling, exchanging feedback – and this process of creating makes me feel proud of our music. If we just received pre-made songs, it would feel mechanical. I feel more love for the process, because we say, 'How about adding this in the lyrics? How about adding this move in the choreography?' "

At the heart of their music is Teddy Park, Blackpink's main producer. "Blackpink in your area!" the iconic phrase that pops up in many of their singles, was Teddy's doing.

"Oppa directs all of Blackpink," says Lisa, using the honorific for an older man. "He knows us incredibly well," she says. "He pushes us hard. 'Again, again, again,' he'd say."

"He'll just randomly call me one day, 'Yo, Jennie, we gotta step up,' " says Jennie. "He's like an alarm, reminding us to keep moving musically. All he has to do is call, 'Hey, what's up?' and I'll be like, 'Oh, my God,' tensing up. But it's a good tension that Blackpink needs."

A Korean American from Los Angeles, Teddy gained mainstream fame in Korea in the late 1990s, first as a rapper in the YG-produced hip-hop boy band 1TYM. The group is often seen as a precursor to BigBang, combining rap, dance, and the good looks typical of K-pop idol groups. "Teddy is hip-hop down to his bones," says Jennie. "And we inherited that."

It's hard to talk about K-pop without mentioning its beating heart of hip-hop. MTV, launched in 1981, was broadcast in South Korea through AFKN, the U.S. military's broadcasting service in South Korea. American GIs and Koreans danced to everything from New Jack Swing to Michael Jackson in nightclubs near Seoul's U.S. military base. Seo Taiji and Boys, a critical precursor to today's K-pop idols, began their career through dance battles at Moon Night in the Itaewon neighborhood.

"The history of hip-hop in Korea did not begin with rappers and DJs; it did with dancers performing to New Jack Swing," writes blogger T.K. Teddy and music critic Youngdae Kim in Vulture. "The fact that the cradle of hip-hop in Korea was the dance club has deep implications that can be seen to this day in mainstream K-pop…the identity of Korean hip-hop as dance music flowed into the mainstream K-pop idol groups, particularly through the producer YG."

Yang Hyun-suk, one of the boys (in Seo Taiji and Boys) and a legendary competitor at Moon Night, would later found YG Entertainment, around the time Korean pop started looking beyond its borders. The agency created hip-hop groups like Jinusean and 1TYM, and found success through BigBang in the mid-2000s. (Yang resigned in 2019 amid a slew of allegations involving some of the label's biggest stars, including sex trafficking and covering up a drug scandal.)

Teddy rarely gives interviews. In 2013, he told Korean news site OSEN that he goes to bed at 9 a.m. and wakes up at 3 p.m., making music during most of his waking hours. Though Teddy has been behind many of the biggest chart-topping hits in Korean pop, he says he doesn't like chart-topping songs, because "I want to eat food that was made by hand in a worn-out store, rather than a franchise dish that sells like it has wings."

> **"OUR HIP-HOP ISN'T THE rebellious kind," Jennie says. "What hip-hop is this? I don't know. It's just cool!"**

Korean hip-hop is more than K-pop idols – think legends like Deux, the Movement Crew, Verbal Jint – but YG's brand, with Teddy at the center, is undeniably one of the most globally popular. Blackpink's potent, inventive sound combines the YG spirit of swag and self-confidence with moments of vulnerability and inventive beats. "Love to Hate Me" recalls 2000s R&B; "How You Like That" is permeated by trap rhythms and catchy, repeating one-liners (common in Blackpink songs). "Crazy Over You" packs in retro hip-hop beats, Balkan touches, and tricky lines – "Simple is so, so, I need that oh no/Don't you know I'm loco" – expertly rapped by Lisa.

"Hip-hop is in my blood," says Lisa, who went solo for the first time with a single written by Teddy. "Lalisa" is infused with a maximalist mix of rap, EDM, brass riffs, and even traditional Thai instruments. Another solo single, "Money," dethroned Drake to take the top spot on *Billboard*'s Rap Digital Songs Sales chart.

"I don't think hip-hop is just about rapping. Look at Rihanna, she could make anything hip-hop. Hip-hop means something different to everyone," says Jennie, who loves Brockhampton (and just saw them at Coachella).

"To me, it's the spirit of cool – vibes, swag, whatever words you can use. I think Blackpink's hip-hop is something the world hasn't seen before," she continues. "We, four girls in their twenties from different backgrounds, are using Korean and English to weave pop music with a hip-hop base. Maybe if the really cool rappers in America, who do 'real hip-hop,' look at us, it can seem a little like kids doing things. Our hip-hop isn't the rebellious kind, but we are doing something very cool. What hip-hop is this? I don't know! It's just cool!"

JISOO SITS in the YG conference room, high above the mighty Han. Known as the funny one within the group, she's quiet and serious today, thinking about big questions and wearing a cap that says "As time goes by it will be better." Jisoo's the only member who hasn't released solo music, though there's buzz she might sometime this year. "I'm not sure how much I want to go solo yet," she says. "The music I listen to, the music I can do, and the music I want to do – what should I choose? I love songs with lots of instruments. I love different bands and rock music. What do people want from me? There's a chaos of conflicting questions."

There's no indication Blackpink is anything but full speed ahead, but behind the veneer of pop perfection, the artists are still figuring out their paths as individual musicians. Each has solo activities: Jisoo acts, and the other three have released singles, including some massive hits – although the sounds don't stray too far from Blackpink's sonic palette, with Teddy involved in most of the songs.

"Is hip-hop the only thing I'm good at?" wonders Lisa. "What if it turns out I'm also good at traditional Thai music?" Her 2021 solo single "Lalisa" incorporated different Thai visuals and sounds, and she points to artists like Rosalía as an exemplar: "Rosalía is so cool. She has her own Spanish culture, that's inside her person, that influences her music.…I'm curious to know how much I can expand what I do. Music-wise, dance-wise, I feel like I still have to learn more."

"The Jennie you've seen so far has been practice," says Jennie, the first member to go solo, in 2018, with the single "Solo," on which she mixes mellow vocals with her character- [*Cont. on 78*]

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL DORSA

The Giant Dreams of Bartees Strange

HE'S BECOME ONE OF THE BUZZIEST ACTS IN MUSIC IN JUST TWO SHORT YEARS — AND HIS ENDLESS CREATIVE AMBITIONS ARE JUST WARMING UP

BY JON BLISTEIN

BARTEES STRANGE needs a new hobby. Back when he wasn't playing football in high school, studying communications in college, or working a nine-to-five at the FCC, he devoted every free hour to music. Now, his only job is writing, recording, and performing songs that defy the gravity of genre to scale some of the highest ambitions on the planet – and that leaves him with time to kill.

He's thinking of taking up rock climbing.

"I've been watching all the documentaries," Strange, 33, says between spoonfuls of pho on a gray March afternoon in Brooklyn. He's never actually been rock climbing, he's quick to add: "I'm horrified of heights, which is probably why I want to do it."

Whatever Strange wants to do, odds are he'll pull it off. That doggedness is a big part of what has made him, in just two short years, one of the most riveting voices in rock and beyond. He announced himself in March 2020 with *Say Goodbye to Pretty Boy*, less a covers EP than a wholesale reimagining of five songs by the National, one of his favorite bands. Seven months later, in the thick of the pandemic, he released his debut album, *Live Forever*. It is pop punk, indie rock, hip-hop, emo; it is R&B, psych-noise, deep house, country. It is all of this, seamlessly distributed across 11 tracks, and sometimes packed into one perfect song, like the instant stunner "Boomer."

Jamie Coletta, Strange's co-manager, remembers hearing *Live Forever* for the first time in 2019: "At first, frankly, I was scared of it. It was like hearing the future."

Live Forever put Strange at the center of a bidding war that eventually landed a deal with 4AD, the venerable U.K. label that will release Strange's second album, *Farm to Table*, in June.

The new album came as a surprise to Strange, who was working on an entirely different LP when this one sprang into being last fall. It was a time of big change: opening for Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus, flying out to London to record at 4AD's studio, thinking about the where-are-you-going, where-have-you-been whirlwind of his life.

Fifteen years earlier, in 2006, a young Bartees Cox Jr. had channel surfed into TV on the Radio's Tunde Adebimpe howling "Wolf Like Me" on *Letterman* – a crystallizing moment that gave a Black kid in the largely white town of Mustang, Oklahoma, the first real glimpse of the kind of music he wanted to make. Now, he was sleeping in the same flat where TV on the Radio did some work back then. He looked around, taking it all in, thinking "Damn, I've got a shot here."

"I used to be on a farm, but now I'm at the table," Strange says. "This is a new world. But I feel ready for it."

The track "Cosigns," which he wrote on that London trip in 2021, serves as a thesis statement for the album – a wildly energetic rap-rock hype-up anthem in which Strange spits witty bars about his tours with Bridgers, Dacus, and Courtney Barnett; boasts about FaceTime calls with Bon Iver's Justin Vernon; and quips, "I'm-a thief when things get big/Look, I'm-a steal your fans."

"I'm the only person who can write that song," Strange says. He's likely also the only one with the nerve to do it.

"As I get close to achieving things that I've wanted for a long time, I feel my appetite growing with it. . . . I talk to my therapist about that a lot," he adds with a laugh. "I feel like I'm going to run myself into the ground if I keep raising the bar for myself. But that's how I am. I like doing things that are hard to achieve."

"AS I GET CLOSE TO ACHIEVING THINGS THAT I'VE WANTED FOR A LONG TIME, I FEEL MY APPETITE GROWING WITH IT. . . . I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO RUN MYSELF INTO THE GROUND. BUT THAT'S HOW I AM."

The day *Live Forever* came out in 2020, Strange was in Maine making music with his friends. For all his confidence, he was anxious about how the record would be received. But he also really wanted to cut some demos at that exact moment. Everything, he accurately intuited, was about to change.

"We all had this feeling of, like, 'We might pull some shit off. Let's remember what this feels like,' " Strange recalls.

He's thought a lot about the fact that the career breakthrough he's been working toward for years has coincided with incredible upheaval and pain in the world. He wrote "Hold the Line," a devastating country-soul ballad, after watching George Floyd's daughter give TV interviews about her father's murder. On "Escape This Circus," he nods to Gil Scott-Heron's "Whitey on the Moon," while pondering the space expeditions of bored billionaires. And on "Mulholland Dr," Strange sizes up the blissed-out, moneyed characters he encountered during a surreal stay in L.A., where he witnessed "so much power that you could do anything with it, except help anyone."

After leaving college in 2012, Strange moved from Oklahoma to Washington, D.C., drawn in part by his love for local legends like Bad Brains and Fugazi. He'd secured an internship, and as he packed up his car, he assured his parents he had a place to stay, too. He then spent two days trying to actually find one. The spot he ended up with was a backyard shed with no water and dirt floors; after running into problems with his landlords, he bailed and spent a couple of months unhoused, showering at the YMCA and sleeping in his car outside the metro station where he commuted to work.

Strange eventually befriended a Howard University student who let him crash at her dorm. To pull this off, Strange pretended to be a student, always making sure to enter the dorm at the same time as his friend. Within a few months, he found a job that paid well enough for him to move out; a couple of more years, and he was working at the FCC as a deputy press secretary during the Obama administration.

"D.C.'s weird," Strange says, laughing at the understatement as he recalls playing hardcore shows at night before going to work on the Hill in the morning. "I mean, arguably there's no more powerful city in the world, and the issues are so outsized – and that feeds into the music."

Strange views crisis and injustice, like so much else, with a sanguine tenacity. Not even several years working for nonprofits in the climate movement could saddle Strange with despair. Instead, he came away more devoted than ever to optimism, "even though it's really fucking hard."

"We need to take a lot more responsibility for the impact we have on each other and on the planet," he says. "I can't be around people who feel like things are out of their control. Because I don't feel like that in my life."

Like his debut, *Farm to Table* is a communal effort that draws on Strange's deep network of musical friends. Pretty much everyone comes from the community he found in

STYLING BY MARISSA PELLY. PREVIOUS SPREAD: JACKET BY LOUIS VUITTON. THIS PAGE: TOP AND BOTTOM BY ANGEL CHEN. SHOES BY DR. MARTENS. JEWELRY BY BERNARD JAME

Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where he moved around 2015, frustrated with his professional life and determined to take a proper stab at music. Around the same time, he took his stage name for a short-lived band called Bartees & the Strange Fruit. (After a few years in New York, he moved back to the D.C. area, where he currently lives.)

The way Strange and his current bandmates tell it backstage before their second of three shows with Car Seat Headrest in Brooklyn, they all met at the can't-miss parties hosted by Taja Cheek, the experimental artist who performs as L'Rain. "There should be a documentary called *Taja's House,*" Strange jokes. "It was all these Black and brown artists who were top quality. I saw them, and I had new heroes – like, I want to command a stage like that. It pushed me to be myself, because everyone there was so different than the next person."

Chris Connors, a close collaborator who worked as an engineer and co-producer on *Farm to Table*, remembers Strange's "joy of exploration" at their London sessions. "He was on the ground, we were running some vocals, and he's so into it," Connors says. "He's so happy, twisting the knobs and getting these cool sounds. It was so playful and natural and pure."

The song Strange was working on then, "Black Gold," is about leaving Oklahoma but trying to stay connected to home. On the bridge, he brought in a chorus of voices – recordings he's made of his family singing over the years.

Growing up, that family was close, devout, and itinerant. His father was an engineer in the military, his mother an opera singer, and they bounced around Europe in his early childhood before settling in the Great Plains. On "Tours," *Farm to Table*'s remarkable acoustic centerpiece, he reflects on the loneliness and frustration he felt when his parents left for long stretches, especially his dad, who was sometimes dispatched to active combat zones. ("Where is Kuwait, is that in the States?" goes one line.)

He hasn't played the song for his parents, but it's not meant as a guilt trip. "They did it for us, and they did it for them, too, because they loved it. And I'm about to do what I love," he says, thinking of his own life on the road and what that might mean for any future family. "I want my kid to see me doing things that I love, so they do what they love."

Backstage in Brooklyn, Strange gives his band a pep talk. "But, yeah, man, you know, it's just rock & roll," he ad-libs with a goofy grin. "We're just rock & roll kids playing rock & roll, jazz, hoochie-koo for years now."

So far, Strange has toured mostly as an opener. "Opening is a trip," he continues. "Sometimes the sound guy gives a shit about you. Sometimes they don't give a fuck and you get what you get, and you gotta prove it to people despite it all."

He doesn't mind that kind of challenge. In fact, he relishes it. "What I do is different," he adds a few weeks later over the phone. "Oftentimes I'm the only person in the room that looks like me, and I'm throwing a lot at people, between the rap stuff, the country stuff, and the rock stuff."

The foundation Strange has built for himself feels sturdy enough to support his endless ambition. For him, it's as much about securing his own dream of a long, sustainable, healthy career in music as it is about ensuring the same possibility for other Black and brown artists in indie rock – a genre that remains overwhelmingly white, from audience to label to media.

"Someone the other day on Instagram called me a token for only playing with white bands," he says. "And I was like, 'I'm doing this so that you can be here.' I might be the only one today, but who are you going to tour with in two years? Hopefully me!"

He connects some of his determined self-belief to his upbringing. "I don't go to church anymore or anything like that, but I still have this spiritual connection to a higher power," he adds. "I feel it in my music. Or I'll look in the crowd and just be like, 'This feels bigger than me.' Whatever this feeling is, it's so real, and we're all experiencing it together. Maybe that's God."

Are Concerts Safe?

AFTER THE TRAGEDY AT ASTROWORLD, THE LIVE-MUSIC INDUSTRY IS GEARING UP FOR ITS BIGGEST SEASON IN YEARS, EVEN AS QUESTIONS CONTINUE TO LOOM ABOUT SAFETY AT CROWDED EVENTS BY ETHAN MILLMAN

Fans are expected to return to festival season in droves this summer.

THIS SPRING, six months after a crowd rush at Travis Scott's Astroworld Festival killed 10 people in Houston and injured hundreds of others, the live-music business is getting ready for another festival season – its first full-scale comeback since the pandemic sidelined concerts in 2020. While the specific legal ramifications of the tragedy remain mired in litigation at press time, several broader questions for the industry loomed. Chief among them: Are music festivals safe, and how does the festival business ensure such a tragedy never happens again?

It will likely be years before the public gets the clearest picture of what exactly went wrong at Astroworld, but those in the live business have seen it as *either* a perfect storm of circumstances and bad luck that lined up for a one-off tragedy *or* a sign of deeper problems that could have happened at any other festival. The answer is complicated, and likely somewhere in between.

The bleakest outlook points to any number of potential red flags throughout the concert industry, with a particular emphasis on allegations of lax security. Several former recruiters who have worked at Contemporary Services Corp. – the main security provider at Astroworld, along with other large-scale-event security companies such as Allied Universal – expressed concerns about what they characterized as widespread security theater. "Any of these major security companies have their own people who know how to work an event, but once you're short on staff, you're hiring anyone off the fucking street," says one former CSC recruiter who left the company several years ago and requested anonymity for fear of retribution. "The licensing process is a joke sometimes."

The former recruiter's assertion lines up with previous reports: After the deaths in November, Astroworld security guard Darius Williams told ROLLING STONE that the training he received prior to the event was an open-book test where he and other guards were spoon-fed the answers so they could all pass. Other potential shortcomings, as referenced in press reports along with a recent task-force report commissioned by the state of Texas, may have included a lack of communication between festival organizers and local officials and an absence of clear preparation for a disaster like a crowd surge. (Scott, Live Nation, and several security companies have all denied any liability for what happened.)

While the former recruiter noted that the security plans for events he worked were often detailed, he said that didn't make much difference if the workers have no institutional knowledge of event security. "They fucking push all these people in there at an event and hope for the best," the recruiter says. "And honestly, it usually mostly works, but this time it went terribly fucking wrong."

Jim Digby, founder and president of the Event Safety Alliance – a nonprofit that provides educational tools for safety at live events – pushes back against this narrative, pointing instead to the comparative rareness of mass-casualty events like Astroworld. "The truth is, at every corner of the globe, there's hundreds of events taking place every night, and we don't hear about catastrophes every day," Digby says. "It's awful that Houston happened, it should've never happened. . . . But I'm optimistic, by

SACHA LECCA

and large, about how the industry handles audience safety."

Still, even Digby concedes that some of the issues that allegedly plagued Astroworld – namely a lack of trained security and event staff – aren't unique to that one event, given the high turnover rates of more experienced festival workers over the past two years.

"We're coming out of stasis. The industry was practically dormant for two years before we had a false start last year, and now we're coming back. It went from zero to 100 overnight," Digby says. "We lost a good percentage of our workforce, and some of that workforce left carrying with it legacy knowledge that helps guide us when potentially unsafe things come to be."

Those factors, coupled with a major surge in the volume of shows across the country in the past year, mean that festival promoters must put extra resources behind briefing and training greener staffers, he says. "We don't typically invest a lot in training as an industry. We hire a vendor who we expect to train staff. If I were a festival promoter, I'd hope whoever's pulling the strings would allow me to bring staff in earlier than normal to remind them about how to do business, demonstrate good crowd-management behavior, and reteach the skills of being an usher or barricade-security person to remind them what we should be looking out for."

Chuck Garelick, a security executive who hasn't worked many music festivals but has significant experience at live events such as fashion weeks and movie premieres, similarly says that given the time away, promoters and the security companies they hire need to focus on staying current.

"Each event is different," Garelick says. "Even if you put on an event every year at the same time, I look at each event almost like it's the first time. What changed? Is your staff the same, do they have the same experience? How many more people will there be? You even have to take into account the weather."

Whether promoters are making more concerted efforts on safety isn't clear; several promoters declined to speak to Rolling Stone on the record for this piece. A few events have acted, with Rolling Loud Miami, for instance, setting an age requirement preventing anyone younger than 16 from attending its event this July.

Garelick adds that he's reluctant to blame the security business for what happened at Astroworld. "In my industry, the great majority are diligent in their services and planning," he says. "I can't speak to what happened at Astroworld, but in the general sense, when a disaster like this happens, you have to look at what occurred."

FOUR OF THE COOLEST GENRES ON THE PLANET RIGHT NOW

Dominican dembow rules the party, U.K. garage returns from the Nineties, Mexican corridos go back to their roots, and digicore keeps on mutating By Julyssa Lopez

DEMBOW

Dominican dembow blends influences from Jamaican riddims, reggae *en español*, and Brazilian funk with the island's distinctive rap vernacular and lyrical traditions. The genre has been growing steadily since the mid-2010s, and it seemed to go fully mainstream in 2021, when artists such as J Balvin and Rosalía released major dembow collaborations. But this year has shown that Dominican artists like **El Alfa** and Tokischa don't need big-name stars to keep going global.

- **WHO** Tokischa, El Alfa, Kiko El Crazy, Haraca Kiko, Chimbala
- **KEY TRACK** "Galapin," El Alfa and El Mayor Clasico

U.K. GARAGE

This syncopated, bass-heavy sound took shape in Nineties London, where DJs chopped and stretched vocal samples and played with tempo like mad scientists, before it spun off into house- and EDM-adjacent variants. Lately it's returned to ambush all forms of pop music: Rappers like Aminé have sneaked rippling synths into musical curveballs like "Sh!t2Luz," while viral Gen Z favorites like **PinkPantheress** and Grace Ives have made the style their own.

- **WHO** Mura Masa, PinkPantheress, Take Van, Grace Ives
- **KEY TRACK** "Bbycakes," Mura Masa, Lil Uzi Vert, PinkPantheress, Shygirl

CORRIDOS

Circa 2019, it seemed the future belonged to corridos tumbados, blending Mexican traditions with modern hip-hop tendencies. But even the most ardent makers of that sound, including tatted ringleader **Natanael Cano**, have scaled back their beats and focused on folksier production. Corridos of all kinds currently make up half of all Mexican-genre streams on Spotify, and they're especially popular with Gen Z TikTok listeners.

- **WHO** Natanael Cano, Yahritza y Su Esencia, Adriel Favela
- **KEY TRACK** "Brillo," Natanael Cano

DIGICORE

Digicore feels like the chaotic kid sibling of hyperpop, characterized by EDM/dance-leaning sounds and a rising group of extremely online artists too rebellious for any label at all. The scene is ultra-young, with many acts still in their teens, gobbling up inspiration from every corner of the digital universe and spitting it back out into pitched-up songs that capture the warp speed of the internet. And it's a scene that's constantly refreshing itself with even newer acts.

- **WHO** Glaive, Dltzk, **Ericdoa**, Osquinn, Twikipedia, Juno, D0llywood1
- **KEY TRACK** "Sad4What," Ericdoa

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF ELJEFE RECORDS; BRENT MCKEEVER; WARNER MUSIC LATINA; JOSEPH MORRISON

▶ Before her NYC debut, Tokischa had been hard at work on her Popola USA Tour, reaching fans in places like Connecticut and Rhode Island.

▼ That day in New York, Tokischa woke up early and had a hearty breakfast at her hotel. "I eat well all day, I drink a ton of water," she says. "I want to be as relaxed as possible."

▶ She was nervous about one thing: "I'm focused on not forgetting my lyrics, because sometimes I forget. But I'm connected to the music and the audience. We're all one."

Truth and Dare

TOKISCHA HAS BECOME THE MOST PROVOCATIVE SUPERSTAR IN DOMINICAN DEMBOW BY MAKING SONGS THAT PULL NO PUNCHES ABOUT SEX, DRUGS, AND QUEERNESS. SHE WANTS TO GO EVEN FURTHER BY JULYSSA LOPEZ

I'M KNOCKING on the door of a spacious hotel suite in midtown Manhattan, and a teasing voice on the other side calls out in Spanish: "The person you're looking for no longer lives here!"

A couple of giggles follow, and the door swings wide open. Standing in front of me is Tokischa Altagracia Peralta, 26, the Dominican force of nature whose explicit, rambunctious, and proudly queer songs about sex, drugs, and *popola* (or pussy) have made her one of the most talked-about figures in the Spanish-speaking music world. She's the dembow ambassador whose star power has been expanding like the universe, who's made Bad Bunny fangirl at award shows, who's selling out venues with no album out. She's controversial, outrageous, and completely beloved or relentlessly reviled, depending on who you ask. She's been fined, threatened with jail, and denounced by conservatives – all things that have only made her more flagrant about who she is. A few days after we meet, she'll upload a video on Twitter that shows her having sex on the balcony of this very hotel, just for the hell of it.

Right now, however, she's smiling sleepily, soft-spoken and approachable, looking more like a college freshman roused for an early class than the Latin-music industry's leading provocateur. It's about 10 a.m., and she stretches out in a lounge chair, enjoying a few free minutes during her first U.S. tour. Tales of her shows have spread like wildfire: They've become liberated, raucous spaces, where everyone lets their freakiest freak flag fly. "I'm very crude with my lyrics, and everything that I'm expressing is very, very, very real," she tells me. "People identify with all of it."

There can be downsides to her approach to fame. Last year, she and J Balvin took heat after the video for their song "Perra" portrayed Black Dominicans as dogs; Tokischa said at the time that she was "truly sorry that people felt offended," but that "art is expression." More shocking was a since-deleted Instagram post she uploaded in April in defense of Rochy RD, a dembow artist arrested

◀ "I get comments where people tell me they've been inspired to liberate themselves and do a lot of things because of how I am, because of my message," Tokischa says.

▶ She had originally planned to perform at Terminal 5 in February, but the show was postponed because of the pandemic. "Every show that's happened before today has been preparation for this major moment," she says.

▶▶ The Dominican artist has always had a sense of style that's her own. Her mother, who lived in the U.S., used to send her copies of *Vogue* and clothes no one else in her neighborhood had: "I had my own flow."

that month on allegations of sexual abuse against a 16-year-old girl. (He has maintained his innocence.) The post, which included a claim that minors will have sex for money, angered even Tokischa's die-hard fans, exposing a chasm between what people want Tokischa to represent and her actual impulses.

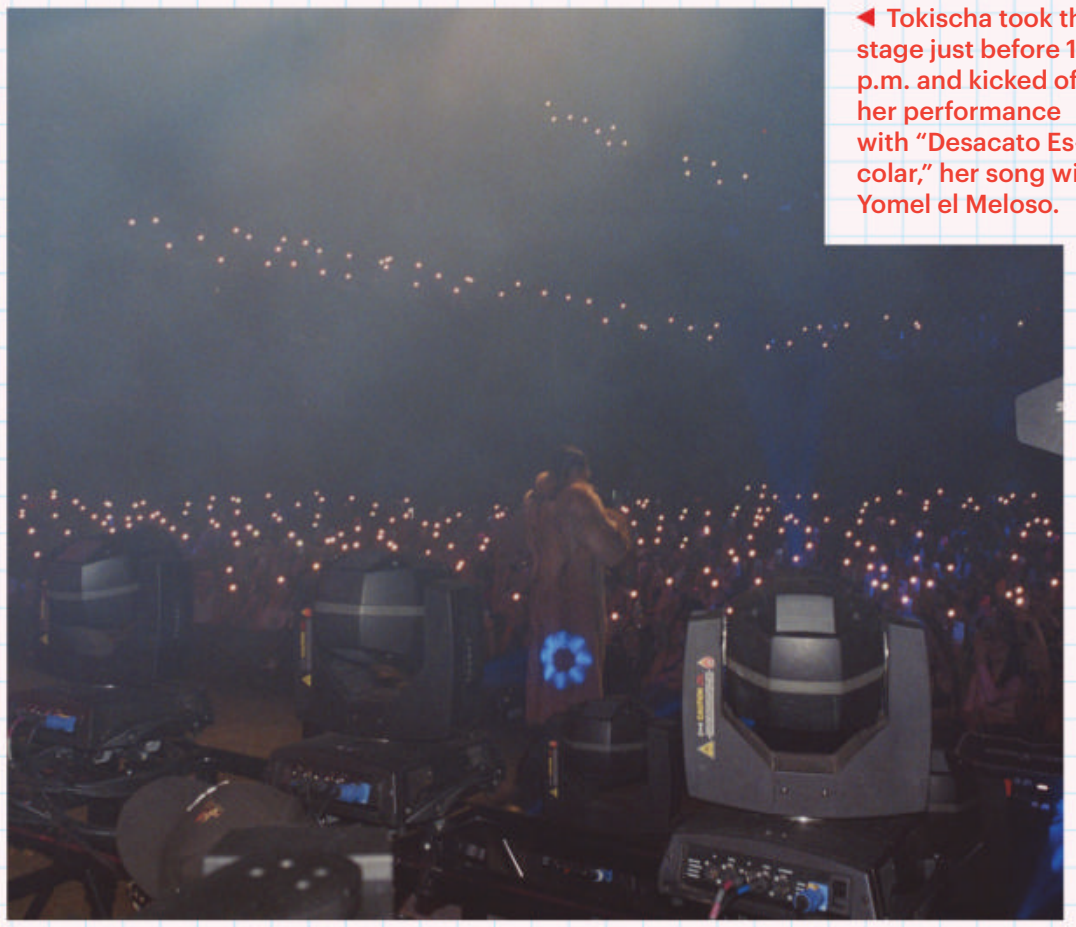
Tokischa has been an avatar for so many things – sexual freedom, queer desire, radical feminism – but she says she is simply articulating her own truths, which include experiences with addiction and sex work. "When I started making music, I said, 'I'm going to be honest about what I'm living through.' This is what art is: the sum of your experiences, your fantasies," she says. That's how she rose through the male-dominated world of dembow – and it's how she plans to keep bulldozing forward.

The story that defines Tokischa's childhood, the one that spills out of her in conversations like she's reciting her own version of Genesis, happened when her mother left her in Santo Domingo to find work in New York. Tokischa was about three years old. Her mother would visit when she wasn't working in factories or as a care provider, but Tokischa was hurt that they couldn't be together. "When I'd see my cousins, my neighbors, my half-sisters from my dad's side with their moms, I'd be conscious of that," she says.

She was an artsy kid who did theater and dance, with a no-bullshit sense of honesty. She always knew she liked girls (she identifies as bisexual), and her first kiss was with a close friend when she was young. "My brother found us, and he hit me so hard," she says, laughing weakly. It didn't stop Tokischa from doing what she wanted. "I gave myself liberty," she says. "Living with a conservative family, one of the first things they tell you – that the whole world tells you – is that you need to wait, stay a virgin until marriage." She lost hers at 16, and the rebellions kept coming: "I'd escape from school all the time. I'd go to the edge of the ocean. I'd go out with guys. Then I'd walk quickly back home, before anyone saw," she says.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CÉSAR BUITRAGO

◀ Beaming about her sold-out show, where fans sang dembow hits before she went on



◀ Tokischa took the stage just before 10 p.m. and kicked off her performance with "Desacato Escolar," her song with Yomel el Meloso.

▲ Toksicha has a tightknit team: She has been working with her manager, Raymi Paulus, for years, and he often backs her onstage as her DJ.

◀ After performing her first song, Tokischa threw off her giant fur coat to reveal a see-through black dress that drove her fans absolutely wild.

▶ Her favorite part of the show, she says, was seeing how diverse the crowd was, and how her music brought all kinds of people together.

At 18, she took a job at a call center. She did it begrudgingly, until someone told her about Craigslist, where wealthy tourists posted ads looking for female escorts. "Millionaire gringos: 'I'm going on vacation, and I'm looking for a girl to share my time with,'" she recites from memory. "Through those ads is how you'd find sugar daddies. I found one, then another, then another."

Around that time, Tokischa met Raymi Paulus, who had been sending shockwaves through the Dominican art scene with his underground films and photography about sex and queer life. "She had a special energy, this way of seeing life that was as real as mine," Paulus says. He's been her manager ever since.

Tokischa started out with hard-hitting trap-soul sounds before moving into dembow. Her songs were often blunt and chaotic, reflecting what she was going through. She'd started using drugs more, and she was living with an older man she describes as a millionaire. "It was a toxic relationship," she says. "Two drug addicts who don't like each other, who are just completing a transaction. But it was a big source of livelihood for me, so I could see my mother, so I could invest in my music." Still, she felt like everything was catching up with her. Getting high, feeling the adrenaline from the crowd at local shows, and experiencing the euphoria of being onstage was too much.

She went to the countryside to detox and has been clean for two years (she started drinking alcohol in December). The process, she says, left her with a sense of clarity that she wants to channel into her debut LP. "I want to make an album that has everything that happened to me in it. Then I can close that chapter."

Just before midnight that night, at New York's Terminal 5, she saunters toward the microphone in a translucent black dress. When she turns around, she reveals that the outfit is completely backless and also assless. The crowd goes berserk. What she saw, she tells me later, was a sea of people from around the world – straight, queer, weird, nonconforming – feeling as free and uninhibited as she did in that moment.

The New ABBA

TO CAP OFF ONE OF POP'S BIGGEST COMEBACKS, THE SWEDISH SUPERSTARS ONLY NEEDED TO BUILD A VENUE AND DIGITALLY REPRODUCE THEMSELVES. INSIDE THEIR GROUNDBREAKING LONDON RESIDENCY BY BRITTANY SPANOS

AFTER THEY BROKE UP four decades ago, ABBA famously refused all kinds of money for reunion performances and tours. But a few years ago, British impresario and entrepreneur Simon Fuller had an idea that piqued the Swedish superstars' interest: What if they could play live without having to show up onstage? "We got sort of turned on by the fact that we could actually be onstage without us being there," ABBA singer-songwriter Benny Andersson says over Zoom.

The band, along with Fuller and their producers Ludvig Andersson (Benny Andersson's son) and Svana Gisla (music-video producer for the likes of Radiohead and Beyoncé), initially explored hologram technology, but that didn't pan out. They finally realized a grander dream: ABBA Voyage, the 196-show concert residency at newly built ABBA Arena in London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park that began May 27. Made with help from George Lucas' Industrial Light & Magic, digital avatars (also known as ABBA-tars) embody the stars in their Seventies prime, performing a 22-song set alongside a flesh-and-blood backing band assembled by James Righton of the Klaxons and including U.K. singer Little Boots on keys. "It's been a lot of uphill," the elder Andersson says. "Brexit, the pandemic. It's been a lot of stuff that hasn't worked well, but we've been resilient."

The band and the team and ILM realized early on that not only was a tour not going to happen, an existing venue wasn't going to work either. There are 1,000 visual-effects artists on ABBA Voyage, making it the biggest project ILM has done, according to Gisla (and this is the company behind *Star Wars,* Marvel, and *Jurassic Park*). The roof of ABBA Arena was reengineered three times to fit the complicated lighting system. Where many concerts might use only one lighting rig, this one uses 20.

The actual ABBA (left) performed for weeks in motion-capture suits to help generate the digital "ABBA-tars" (above), which are joined by a live band during the residency.

There was a lot of work put into making the ABBA-tars – which, the band stresses, are not holograms, but digital versions of the members – feel like real, physical performers. The four members of ABBA met from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, for four and half weeks straight, performing for 200 cameras and a crew of nearly 40 people while wearing motion-capture suits. They posted up in a sound studio within the Swedish Film Institute, playing all the songs they had carefully curated for their first show in 40 years. "It was really a pleasure for all of us," Andersson says. Back in London, body doubles emulated the performances, but with a younger energy. "We are sort of merged together with our body doubles. Don't ask me how it works because I can't explain that," Andersson continues. "If you're 75, you don't jump around like you did when you were 34, so this is why this happened."

Andersson was impressed when he watched himself and the others "perform" for the first time in April. "I see myself standing onstage, talking to you. It's absolutely believable. It's not unbelievable. It's believable!"

In rehearsals, Andersson and bandmate Björn Ulvaeus were hit with a spark of creativity. They penned "I Still Have Faith in You" and "Don't Shut Me Down," and asked Agnetha Fältskog and Anni-Frid Lyngstad if they'd record the songs for the show. "We found we're still good enough," Andersson says. Eventually, they recorded a whole album, last year's *Voyage*.

As impressive as the tech is, Gisla and Ludvig Andersson worry about how it could be used. "I personally don't think that doing things posthumously with artists that are passed away, where they have no hand or opinion or say in the matter, is a good idea," Gisla explains. "ABBA made this show, but had they not been involved, it wouldn't be an ABBA concert."

For millennials and Gen Z kids, ABBA are fixtures: There are ABBA-themed parties across the globe, and songs like "Dancing Queen" have become hits on TikTok. Andersson still doesn't understand. "That's pretty weird, isn't it? It's 40 years ago, and the corpse is still moving. I don't know. Maybe it's good enough. Maybe that's the only answer."

FROM TOP: ABBA VOYAGE, 4; BAILLIE WALSH

FUTURE OF MUSIC

Omar Apollo Frees His Mind

THE MEXICAN AMERICAN GEN Z HEARTTHROB PROUDLY REPRESENTS HIS CULTURE. BUT FIRST HE HAD TO LEARN TO BE TRUE TO HIMSELF

BY TOMÁS MIE

HERE HE COMES NOW, sauntering down the sidewalk in L.A.'s Westchester neighborhood, a few blocks from LAX – iced coffee in hand, friend by his side, and a Whitney Houston song on his mind. "I'm saving all my love for *youuuu*," he hum-sings with effortless soul and a soft smile, a friendly giant at 6 feet 5 inches. He introduces himself as he approaches: "Hi, I'm Omar."

Omar Apollo leads us into an unassuming house that looks like it should be hosting a college party, with strange doodles on the wall, misplaced Xbox controllers, and a car door leaning against the kitchen bar. For now, he's dressed casually, in gray sweatpants, a dark flannel over a white tank top, and Birkenstock clogs. It's about 11 a.m. on a Tuesday in March; in a couple of hours, he'll be shooting the video for "Tamagotchi," the latest single from his magnum opus, *Ivory*, which came out in April.

With its bouncy Neptunes beat, flirty, bilingual lyrics, and effortlessly catchy chorus ("You with somebody, or are you cool?/ I want your body, you want me too"), "Tamagotchi" is a perfect example of the qualities that have made Apollo, 25, one of the most exciting artists of his generation. A self-taught Mexican American musician with a remarkable vocal range, he saw nearly overnight success after uploading a smoldering, D'Angelo-style R&B song called "Ugotme" in 2017. Since then, he's collaborated with everyone from Bootsy Collins to the Strokes' Albert Hammond Jr. to Spanish rap star C. Tangana (the latter earning him a Latin Grammy Record of the Year nomination); won comparisons to Prince and Frank Ocean that, amazingly, don't feel hyperbolic; and built a devoted, diverse base of Gen Z fans, largely Latino, often queer, who feel represented by his work.

One thing Apollo hadn't done, until April at least, is release an album. *Ivory* is his full-length studio debut, and it's been a lon

PHOTOGRAPH BY SINNA NASSER

time coming. He had a version done last September, but it didn't feel like his own. "I was just not excited to release it, nor perform it," Apollo says. "I didn't set boundaries with anybody. Everything I made, I'd send to my management and to people at the label, and gave them direct access to the whole process. It was no longer my music. It was more like a bunch of opinions."

Apollo says it took some advice from a close friend for him to learn to protect his space. "I need the creative process for me," he says. "I had problems with confrontation growing up. Now, I can just say how I feel, no matter what."

The final version of *Ivory* is laced with funky, psychedelic, R&B sounds, raw, relatable emotions, and a tribute to his Mexican heritage. It's a record meant to be listened to from start to finish. It's Omar being Omar. "I love someone who knows the worlds they want to create with their music, instead of guessing them," says *Ivory*'s main producer, Carter Lang, the production mastermind behind much of SZA's *Ctrl*. "Omar has ideas just frozen within him waiting to come out every single day."

Minutes after arriving on set, Apollo finds a quiet moment in the garage, surrounded by some decorative Coors Light and Tecate beer-can boxes mounted on a wall, presumably the property of the three white dudes in their early twenties who lent their house for the shoot.

Before he moved to L.A. three years ago, Apollo was living in his parents' attic in Hobart, Indiana, where he was born Omar Apolonio Velasco, his middle name a tribute to his grandfather. One of his *tíos*, Tomás, lives in a similar garage to this one back at the Velasco home; the singer's mom, Enriqueta, worked as a lunch lady at Omarcito's school, while his dad, Roberto, delivered food for the same cafeteria. His parents immigrated to the Midwest from Guadalajara, Mexico, with his dad coming first, circa 1979, to get away from gang violence and to seek new opportunities. After years of sending each other love letters, Roberto returned to Mexico to help Enriqueta cross the border. A 12-year-old Omar, the youngest of three siblings, later helped his parents memorize the names of the states so they could pass their U.S. citizenship tests.

"KIDS WOULD TELL ME, 'YO, MY PARENTS ARE FROM MEXICO TOO. WE'RE FIRST-GENERATION,'" SAYS APOLLO. "THAT'S WHEN IT FELT LIKE, 'OH, WOW. THIS IS BIGGER THAN ME.' " I DIDN'T HAVE ANYONE LIKE THAT."

Apollo recently taught his dad how to use Apple Music, so Papa Velasco could listen to some of his son's new singles on his phone. "He just called me the other day. He's like, 'Mijo, I don't know why you're always stressed. Your music sounds good. You have no reason to be stressed. You have no reason!' " the singer recalls. "It was supersweet."

During Apollo's childhood, songs by Vicente Fernández, Pedro Infante, and Juan Gabriel filled his home. The colorful, beloved Gabriel, also known as Juanga or the Divo de Juarez, became an international icon in the decades before his death, in 2016, and served as the main inspiration for "En El Olvido," an emotional, stripped-down corrido that's a welcome twist on the psychedelic R&B sounds of the rest of Apollo's new album.

Apollo's Mexican American roots are key to *Ivory*. Around the time he decided to scrap his original version of the LP, he grabbed his bags and spent time in Mexico City, thanks to an invitation from Alberto Bustamante, a queer architect from Oaxaca who performs as a DJ under the name Mexican Jihad. He's now Apollo's creative director. "We just clicked," says Bustamante, who helped make *Ivory*'s black-and-white cover art, an homage to the *galán* telenovela actors of the 1950s. "And we became amigas."

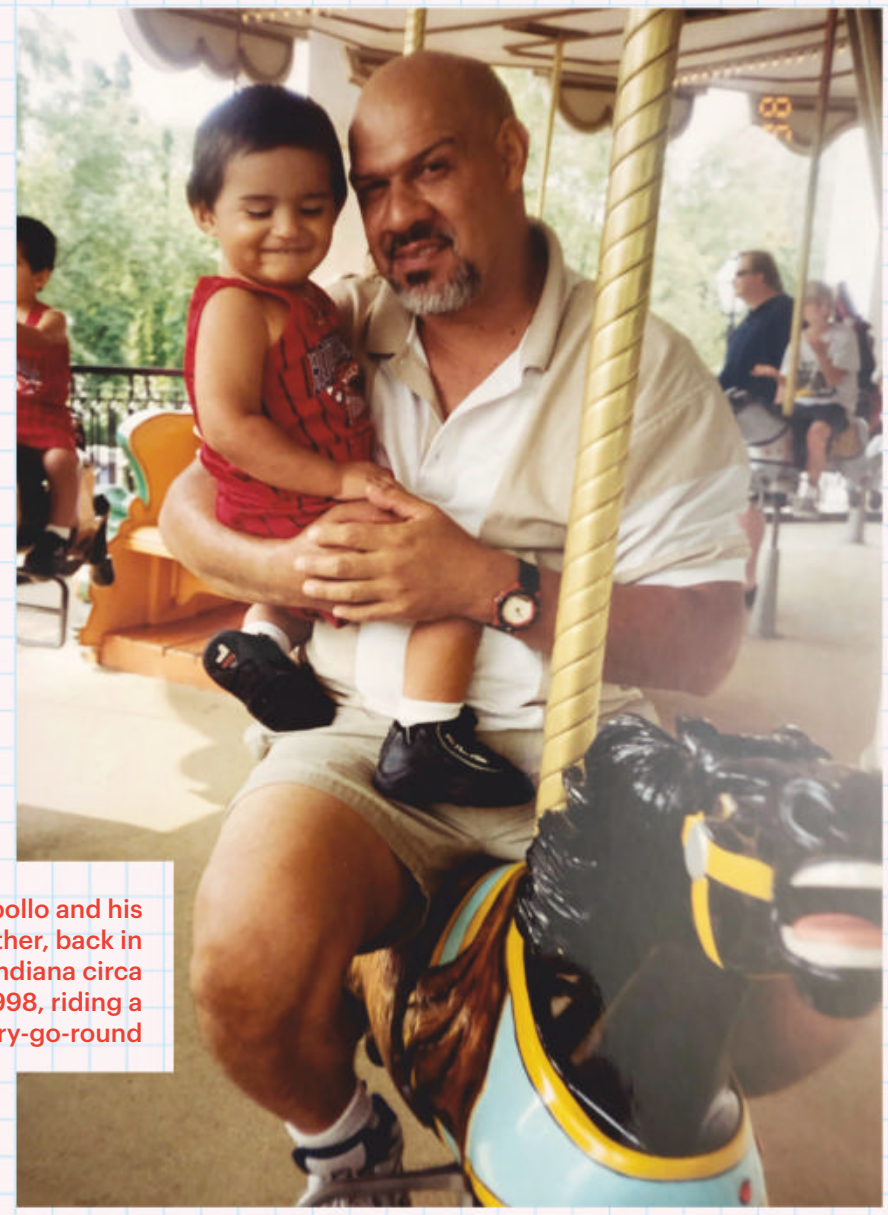
At the "Tamagotchi" video set, Bustamante shows up wearing an explicit T-shirt of Satan fucking a man flaunting an erect penis on a pentagram. "It doesn't get better than satanic gay sex," he says with a smile. His explicit approach to queerness and eroticism seems to contrast with Apollo's more low-key take on expressing his sexuality. "It's superpowerful but complicated," Bustamante says. "If you define yourself as a gay artist, you only fit in the gay-artist box. That doesn't happen to other artists."

Apollo doesn't like to label himself. "It is what it is," he says matter-of-factly. "I'm very open about it in my music and on Twitter. But when it comes to identifying myself . . . it feels good to say 'queer.' I don't know. I'm complex."

Queer love is laced throughout his lyrics on the new album, and it's a big part of what's made his music resonate with fans. In the trippy video he released earlier this year for the melancholic ballad "Invincible," he sings about a "Latin boy" with a "Frida Kahlo brow," as two men in masks (made by Costa Rican artist Andrés Gudiño) hold hands and caress each other's bodies. Bustamante says they weren't trying to be too literal with the visual, "but at the end, people caught the message."

Later in the afternoon, friends of Apollo who will appear as extras in the video trickle into the backyard, where there's a ripped-apart sofa and a chicken-wire sculpture. Apollo – already in some black Nike Cortezes and baggy pants for the video's next look – greets them with the same soft smile and a hug before giving the halfpipe a try. Homeboy can skate.

On the set, as he takes direction from Jake Nava – the British director behind Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" and "Black Is King" videos –



Apollo and his father, back in Indiana circa 1998, riding a merry-go-round

COURTESY OF OMAR APOLLO

the quiet Mexican American kid in love with music takes over. As Nava shares tips and directions, Apollo nods and listens and follows along.

I tell him that I can relate to him – my parents, too, immigrated without papers from Mexico – and ask if he feels a responsibility in representing our culture. He pauses to think, then names several other young Mexican American artists making their mark while staying true to their roots. "You got Jean Dawson, Cuco, Miguel, Niko Rubio," he says. "It's supersick to see, because there wasn't that when I started."

Through his first two EPs and mixtape, *Apolonio,* Apollo had already found a voice for the intricacies of being "ni de aquí ni de allá" – not from there nor from here. "Kids would tell me the exact same thing you did and be like, 'Yo, my parents are from Mexico too. We're first-generation,'" he says. "That's when it felt like, 'Oh, wow. This is bigger than me.' I didn't have anyone like that." When he announced "Tamagotchi," a fan quote-tweeted him with a Mexican-flag emoji and wrote, "The Mexican kid got a track with the Neptunes. We up."

Apollo's eyes light up as he reminisces about the "vamos pa' Miami" trip he took to meet with Pharrell last April. "I was like, 'Say less,'" he recalls with a smile. "He started making a beat, like, *psh psh psh*. Like Pharrell. He goes downstairs, so I just start writing and recording. I make the whole song in 30 minutes. And he comes back in and goes, 'How's it going?' He pressed the space bar and got so excited. That's when there started to be chemistry. He was like, 'Oh, that's what you're on!'"

Pharrell then disappeared and came back with 20 people, including Pusha T. "He went, 'Y'all gotta listen to this shit, man. He went crazy,'" Apollo remembers. They ended up making a handful of songs together before Pharrell asked him to extend his stay. They made five "from scratch," one of which Apollo promises is "living somewhere else, but is gonna come out."

Apollo nonchalantly mentions that he's planning to move to Mexico City after his tour wraps, "probably just to chill." For the son of Mexican immigrants, a move like that could be a return to the mythical Aztlán – a way of resetting his life in a place that feels like home on a profound level, but one that also provides a new environment for the singer to explore his creativity. "I did start planning my life recently," he adds. "I'm going to move to New York in 2024. I need the change. I need to move around. If I'm comfortable, I get nothing done. . . . You gotta manifest it."

TAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF IMMERSIVE VIDEO TECHNOLOGY

Chicago post-punk band Ganser use LED Volume screens — the same futuristic tech used for *The Mandalorian* — to film a pair of ambitious videos on a budget

IF YOU'D TAKEN a wrong turn on the expansive-looking film set for Chicago post-punk group Ganser's latest music videos, you might have accidentally crashed into a wall. That's because rather than shoot outside or use a green-screen background, the band tried out an LED Volume backdrop — essentially an array of high-resolution screens that can respond realistically to camera movement, similar to a video game. It's the same technology Disney+ uses for *The Mandalorian*.

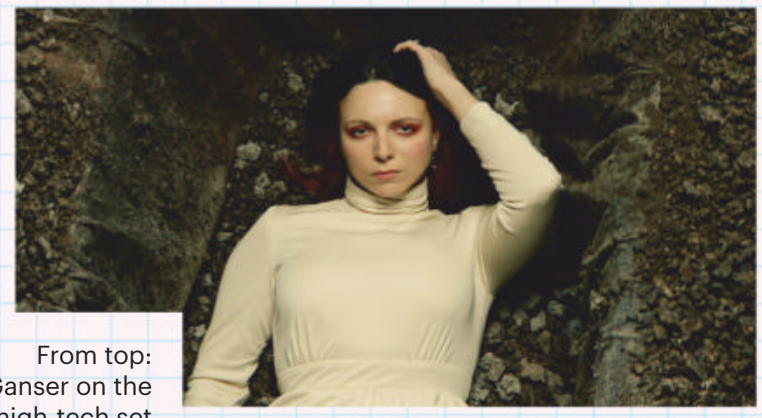
"When you think about the cost of building out a full set versus just being able to render one with this LED backdrop, it will have a benefit for people who couldn't afford that," says co-lead vocalist Nadia Garofalo, who works in the film industry.

Bassist and co-lead vocalist Alicia Gaines was impressed by how the volume setup enabled virtual-production supervisor Andy Jarosz to create a dynamic environment for the shoot: "Andy was adding in trees and changing lighting on the fly." She adds, "I have a feeling that there's going to be a lot of very fantastical music videos coming up, especially from artists much larger than ourselves."

For the propulsive disco-punk stomper "People Watching," Ganser conceptualized a clip in which Garofalo lies in a hole and her bandmates bury her alive. The group made a short trip into the cornfields outside Chicago during wintertime to film some exterior shots. Later, they decorated Resolution Studios with fake snow and cornstalks that matched the backdrop. "It's kind of nice to be like, 'OK, we're shooting it in the cold winter — but we don't have to actually go out and dig a hole in the ground and be outside for 10 hours,'" Garofalo says. "Saving crews from elements is cool, too."

The ambitious quartet filmed everything during a marathon, one-weekend shoot. "I was being shot from the waist down," Gaines recalls of the burial scene, "so I was burying Nadia in fake soil and looking at the monitor on one side, checking her lip-sync. This was our most difficult video to make."

For "What Me Worry?," a more echoey, experimental track that will appear with "People Watching" on Ganser's upcoming *Nothing You Do Matters* EP, they reversed the action, this time with Gaines escaping from the grave. They also pulled the camera back to reveal the LED Volume setup, proudly showing off their magic trick's prestige. "It just makes everything so much more possible," Garofalo says. "Even with smaller budgets where we can't afford to shoot on those big locations or build these crazy worlds." KORY GROW



From top: Ganser on the high-tech set of their new videos; Garofalo gets buried alive; Gaines sings on screen.

FROM TOP: SAMANTHA MONENDO; COURTESY OF GANSER, 2

Brooklyn on Fire

NEW YORK'S DRILL SCENE IS PRODUCING SOME OF THE HOTTEST ANTHEMS IN THE WORLD. CRITICS INCLUDING THE CITY'S MAYOR BLAME THE MUSIC FOR VIOLENCE. LEADING ARTISTS SAY THAT'S ALL WRONG BY WILL DUKES

WHEN THE NEWS BROKE in February that 18-year-old Jayquan McKenley, who recorded under the name Chii Wvttz, had been murdered in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, it sent ripples through a city already reeling from what seemed like one violent incident after another. Many seized on the slain teen's affiliation with the burgeoning Brooklyn drill scene, seeing an inextricable link between the music and bloodshed – including Eric Adams, New York's recently inaugurated mayor, who condemned drill as "alarming" and blamed it for inciting violence.

To the millions of fans who listen to Brooklyn drill, that couldn't be more wrong. They see drill as a vibrant new movement representing an outlet for young people in some of New York's most dangerous neighborhoods and beyond. "Brooklyn is on fire right now," says East New York's Bizzy Banks, who is one of the movement's hottest up-and-comers at age 23. "We create new waves here – new dances, new words, new energy coming out of Brooklyn."

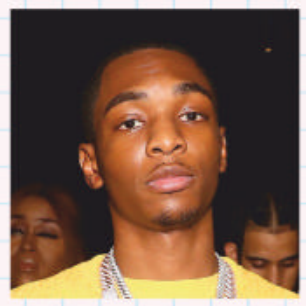
To genuinely appreciate the wave that's cresting in the borough that brought us Biggie, Basquiat, and Spike Lee, it helps to look first at drill's origins in Chicago last decade. By the end of President Obama's first term, the Windy City had spawned a legion of young spitters such as Chief Keef and King Louie, whose dead-eyed nihilism made their city an easy target for right-wing pundits. As the music made its way east, it became more worldly; the late Pop Smoke's 2019 mixtape *Meet the Woo,* largely produced by London's 808 Melo, is a landmark of Brooklyn drill whose impact is still being felt two years after Smoke's tragic murder in a robbery gone wrong. "I love what New York did with drill," East Side Chicago native G Herbo, who helped invent the subgenre in the 2010s, said in a recent radio interview. "They took something and enhanced it."

Today, going outside in the five boroughs can expose you to a whole mélange of diasporic dopeness. You might find London's signature woozy bass notes cleaving to the slick rhythms and cadences of Brooklyn, all coming from a parked car with its doors ajar, blasting the hottest new song. Everything is ultramodern and swagged-out, sharp as the contours on a fresh-out-of-the-oven slice. Let the gentrifiers call in a complaint – the music isn't about to stop.

Bizzy, whose video for his 2021 song "Quarantine Freestyle" has racked up 1.7 million views on YouTube, is proof that Brooklyn drill is about much more than promoting violence. For starters, Bizzy's a bona fide lyricist: His bars are precise, and his slang is dense. "I actually rap, like wordplay and metaphors and punchlines," he says. "A lot of people don't really rap. People say what sounds cool. I make stuff make sense."

Bizzy feels strongly that the negative content in drill songs is more of a symptom than it is a cause. "I feel like the music just let you know what's going on," he says. "The violence be already there sometimes."

Cory Pegues, former deputy inspector of Brooklyn's 67th precinct and an expert on gangs, agrees that much of the negative media attention on drill rappers is missing the point. "I don't think it's just drill," the retired police officer says bluntly. "Most of these rappers, they come from the low end of the totem pole – no education, no heat, no lights, no gas. These kids are speaking of what they live." (Pegues is also skeptical of linking the genre to a rise in crime: "I want to see the numbers. If you're going to say this drill music is out of control and killing everybody, then I'm about facts.")



Bizzy Banks Featured on Pop Smoke's posthumous *Faith* and quick with a sharp punchline

22Gz One of the artists behind Brooklyn drill's early rise, with an eye for bleak imagery

B-Lovee A South Bronx native who's interested in expanding drill's horizons toward R&B

B-Lovee, who hails from the Bronx's Andrew Jackson Houses, seems dedicated to showing that there are other sides to the genre. The Columbia Records signee, whose Wayne Wonder-sampling single "IYKYK" has millions of Spotify streams and YouTube views, makes smooth, R&B-centric hits with a hint of grit that capture the fun of an uptown summer park jam. "I try to make all different types of music, so I won't be stuck on the same sauce, just straight aggressive drill," says B-Lovee, 21. "I want to make songs for the ladies, songs for the people that's getting fly."

B-Lovee's South Bronx neighborhood sees 20.5 serious crimes per 1,000 residents annually, according to a 2020 report by the NYU Furman Center – more than double the citywide rate – but he wants to steer clear of violence and negativity. Back in February, he was one of several drill artists who met with Adams to discuss the music's impact on New York's young people: "We sat down, talked, and that was a good experience. It was good to have the talk."

Back in Brooklyn, 22Gz reflects the harsher tones of the scene's beginnings. While other New York rappers his age were still trying to land a freestyle on Funkmaster Flex's popular Hot 97 radio show, he stormed social media in 2016 with the ruthless jack-boy anthem "Suburban," delivering lyrics in an intense torrent of coldblooded bluster. "I definitely say I started Brooklyn drill," says the 24-year-old artist. "All the other artists who was around that time helped me to build Brooklyn drill, but I was the pioneer."

Though the content of 22's songs can be grisly, he views it all as art. "It's like Picasso – you can't tell him to paint the picture a certain way," he says. The lyricist be-

FROM TOP: JOHNNY NUNEZ/WIREIMAGE, 3

Fivio Foreign is one of drill's leading voices, and he's looking to give back to the community.

GROOMING BY REMY MOORE AT SEE MANAGMENT

hind such artful threats as "hollow gon' rip off his shoulder, that's a poster" is quick to add, though, that other drill artists need to lay off some of the more mindless clichés. "I feel like the drill rappers could chill out with, like, putting the guns in the videos." he says. "Just try to not give off that image as much. 'Cause they kind of making it a problem now."

22 sees Brooklyn's multicultural makeup as the key to drill's rise. "It's the Caribbean vibe mixed with the American vibe, and you put that together," he says. "Plus the Brooklyn drip, the clothes and all the swag. It was just perfect."

Sheff G is another Brooklyn drill architect who sees something magical in his borough. "You know Brooklyn – we gonna put on our own sauce on shit," he says. "We ain't never gonna copy nobody's style."

He sounds so upbeat, you would hardly know the artist born Michael Williams, age 23, is calling from Bare Hill Correctional Facility in Franklin County, New York, where he's been serving a second-degree weapons sentence since last year. The Flatbush native, who burst onto the scene in 2017 with his grime-influenced loosies (and had producers clamoring for his attention, labeling their own compositions with the phrase "Sheff G type beat"), is open about how society misrepresents rappers like him as inherently violent. "Guns don't kill people, people kill people," he says, matter-of-factly.

Sheff is also clear on how his influence continues to propel the movement, especially so-called sample drill – the latest iteration of the scene, where old songs get sampled and thrown on top of drill drums. Sheff notes that his 2019 song "We Getting Money," which sampled a ghostly vocal from Japanese singer Hiromi Ōta, and his and frequent collaborator Sleepy Hallow's 2020 single "Tip Toe," based on a Tiny Tim flip, are early examples of this trend. "If you see the songs that's coming out now, a lot of the songs got samples in it, with female voices and stuff like that – me and [Sleepy Hallow] was already doing shit like that," he says.

Having grabbed the torch from the first wave of Brooklyn drill's innovators, Fivio Foreign is all about the genre's future. The gravelly-voiced rapper took over the second half of 2020 with his viral hit "Big Drip," whose video has a whole Hennessy-brandishing squad smoking in front of a Shake Shack, of all places. There's a ton of negative space in Fivio's delivery (he says he's on demon time), and each staggered bar feeds off an exuberant burst of energy. When he utters his patented "ayy, ayy, ayy!" ad-lib, it's as if he's reprimanding someone for interrupting his flow.

Fivio's profile got a boost last summer when Kanye West featured him on *Donda*, giving the drill dynamo a chance to showcase his socially conscious side on "Off the Grid." And while he's personally overcome many of the negative conditions that still surround other drill artists, he recognizes that there's still a lot of work to do.

Reached for an interview, he's most excited to talk about the nonprofit he began in 2020, Foreignside Foundation, and its programs for at-risk youth and families of incarcerated people. "Listen, there's more to us," says Fivio, 32. "We also here to help the community, know what I'm saying? We just wanna change the narrative, the perspective of drill music, period."

22Gz is optimistic about where drill is headed too. "I like where I'm at with this rap shit," he says. "I feel like I could get a little more credit, but it is what it is – as long as the shit keep going. 'Cause I really made the sound so the youngest can have a voice in the city. You feel me?"

PHOTOGRAPH BY VICTOR LLORENTE

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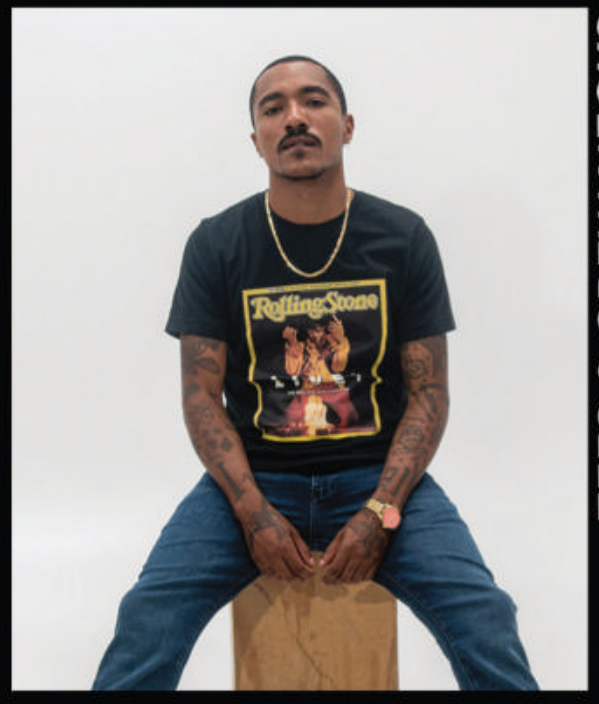

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Reviews

Music

HARRY THROWS A HOUSE PARTY

Harry Styles delivers sleek, heartfelt pop pleasures on his great third album

By JON DOLAN

Harry Styles

Harry's House

SONY

★★★★☆

WHEN HARRY STYLES left the U.K. boy band One Direction he was eager to prove his musical ambition and historical knowledge. His debut 2017 single was the brazenly enormous Bowie/Queen-style ballad "Sign of the Times." An artist in his position could've come off as insecure or overreaching, but Styles has relaxed with winning ease into his role as a gender-fluid, genre-fluid megastar, a new-look rock & roll gentleman who can flip from guitar raunch to soul to soft rock and convincingly pull off a come-on like "I know that you're scared because I'm so open." He's a Mick Jagger for our more enlightened age.

With his third album, *Harry's House,* he's ➔

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Rory Kurtz

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Styles at Coachella in April

HARRY STYLES

pulled off the neat trick of making his music at once elegant and more refined but also warmer and more intimate – the polished-marble smoothness of Steely Dan with the generosity of an Al Green or Yo La Tengo record. *Harry's House* is bright with synths and horns, often steeped in slick, sticky synth-pop and R&B. He kicks things off with the date-night splendor of "Music for a Sushi Restaurant," a sensual splurge of Prince-ly elation, as he sings about green eyes, fried rice, sweet ice cream, and blue bubblegum twisted 'round your tongue. "Late Night Talking" is a spot-on study in early-Eighties smoothness, with Styles tenderly promising to "follow you to any place/If it's Hollywood or Bishopsgate."

A lot of young artists trying on sleek Eighties sounds tend to lapse into a kind of pantomime of cocaine-glazed New Wave detachment. And indeed, Styles does mention "doing cocaine in my kitchen" on the crisp synth-pop shuffle "Daylight." But the song is sweet, not mirror-shades creepy, with Styles in a haze of comedown reflection thinking about New York bicycle rides and comparing himself to a bluebird ready to fly to wherever you're at. On songs like "Keep Driving" and "Grapejuice," the airy, sumptuous grooves clear a space for Styles to explore a sense of desire that's tinged with openness and vulnerability.

Styles took the title for *Harry's House* from a line on Joni Mitchell's 1975 album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. He takes a break from the dance floor to let his Laurel Canyon love flow on ballads like the languorous "Little Freak," which big-ups his beloved's "delicate point of view," and "Matilda," where he helps the titular hero sort through the ambivalence that comes with entering adulthood on your own. In these moments it's almost like he's the kind of lover and friend that the Joni of *Blue* deserved but couldn't quite get because it was the Seventies and people hadn't figured out how not to be assholes yet.

Throughout the album, Styles' singing is as conversational as his lyrics, making romance feel like a hopeful, at times fragile, dialogue between equals. It makes sense that *Harry's House* is coming out just as summer bar-patio season is kicking into full swing. This is a Santa Ana summer breeze of a record. ®

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

ANGEL OLSEN'S BIG LOVE

Indie-rock darling makes a joyful, triumphant breakthrough LP By SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

LISTENING TO Angel Olsen's records used to feel like stumbling into an empty roadside bar and finding the greatest torch singer the world had ever forgotten. The intimacy of those early LPs made many fans feel like she was staring directly into their souls, creating a level of legend-in-her-own-

time acclaim that Olsen herself has sometimes seemed ambivalent about.

Not anymore. *Big Time,* Olsen's sixth album, is a jaw-droppingly confident step into the spotlight, revealing a singer who can't wait to tell you how great life can be. "Good-morning kisses, giving you all mine/Pull back the curtains, show me the sunshine," she sings on the title track, her voice ringing out bright and tender over a velvety countrypolitan arrangement. She's Roy Orbison, she's Patsy Cline, she's Willie Nelson. She's Angel Olsen, fully and completely, making the past decade of her career feel like a warmup.

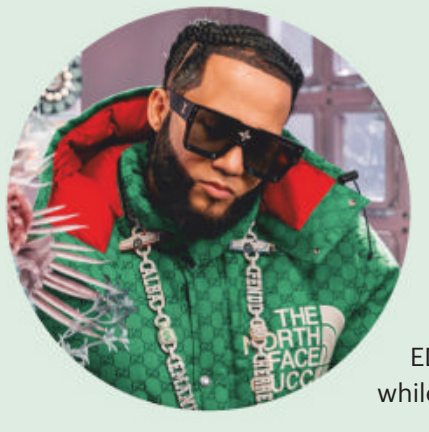
She co-wrote that blissful title track with her real-life romantic partner, Beau Thibodeaux, and while it can be dangerous to treat songwriting as autobiography, Olsen has made a point of presenting *Big Time* as her first album since coming out as queer. Happiness suits her; you can hear her exhaling with a new freedom in every song here, from the sun-dappled *Tapestry* pianos of "Ghost On" to the towering Sixties-pop crescendo of "Right Now." Some of them have darker lyrics than others – Olsen is frank about grief's everyday weight on "This Is How It Works" – but what comes through most clearly is the contented melodic radiance that the past few years have unlocked in her.

Angel Olsen
Big Time
Jagjaguwar
★★★★☆

That feeling extends to the lush sound created by Olsen and co-producer Jonathan Wilson, who's brought his Nashville-via-Laurel Canyon magic to records by Father John Misty and Dawes. The country-tinged beauty of this album is a revelation after 2019's grand, gloomy *All Mirrors* and 2020's stripped-back *Whole New Mess*.

Toward the end of *Big Time,* Olsen switches things up with a dramatic crisis of confidence. "I wanna go home/Go back to small things," she sings on "Go Home." In the past, she might've sounded alone. What you hear this time, as the strings swell, is a star who's never been further from fading away. ®

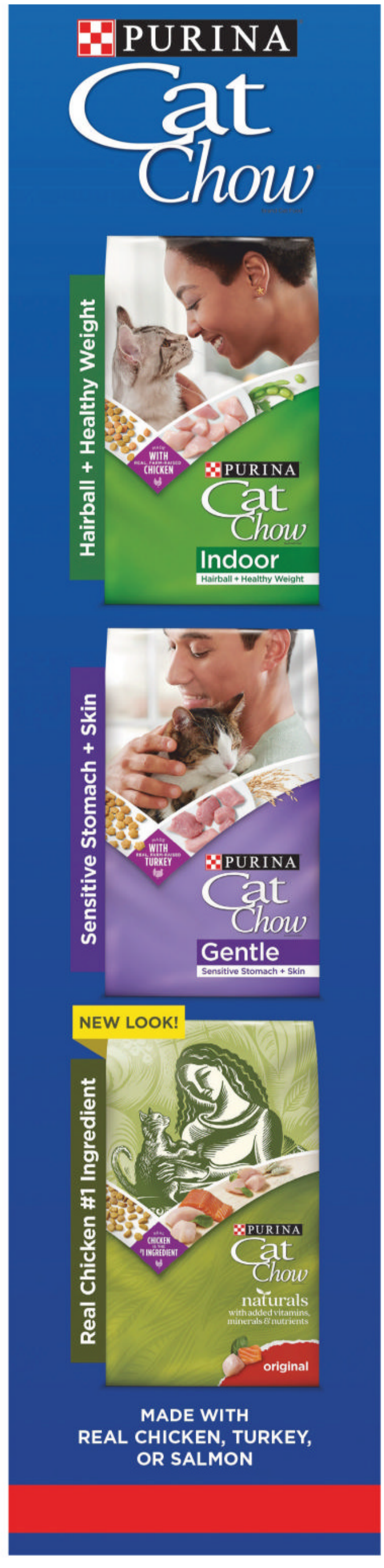
FROM TOP: ANGELA RICCIARDI; COURTESY OF EL JEFE RECORDS



BREAKING

El Alfa's Universal Dembow Vision

IF THERE'S ONE person who represents the global force that Dominican dembow has become, it's El Alfa. He's the go-to collaborator for stars such as Bad Bunny, Farruko, and Nicky Jam, and on his impressive fourth album, *Sabiduria,* he brings even more eager artists into his orbit. French Montana, Lil Pump, and Farina are just a few of the people who join El Alfa as he mixes dembow with EDM, trap, and pop without ever losing his essence, sounding stronger and wiser while reminding people why the dembow throne is his. **JULYSSA LOPEZ**



REVIEW

WILCO GET BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

The 24-song set of refined country rock is unexpected and welcome

WILCO'S FIRST gesture back in the Nineties was to leave behind the sound of founder Jeff Tweedy's first band, Midwestern alt-country icons Uncle Tupelo. Now, 27 years down the road, they've detoured back to the roots they never wanted, with a double LP of gorgeous rusticity. Recorded in empathetic live takes, the detail and texture of the music are sublime. "All you've got to do is sing in the choir," Tweedy sings on the title track, a lilting waltz. But if songs like "Hints" and "Tired of Taking It Out on You" are the definition of refined pastoral comfort, there's plenty of darkness edging in, too. Tweedy converses with death ("A Lifetime to Find") and evokes American immigration paranoia on "I Am My Mother." He closes the journey with the somber "Plains," about freedom and boredom, apathy and absence, always aware that the scariest wide-open space of all is the one inside your mind. JON DOLAN

Wilco
Cruel Country
★★★★☆

Tweedy

Quick Hits

Ten new albums you need to know about now

Black Star
No Fear of Time
Luminary

STAR POWER The beloved Nineties hip-hop duo are back with their first record in 24 years, and it's like nothing's changed. Their new work resounds like a Mandarin manifesto for the 99 percent.

★★★★☆

Horsegirl
Versions of Modern Performance
Matador

GIDDYAP! Finally, a record that truly evokes the best and grimiest of post-punk, courtesy of a trio from Chicago who conjure the beautifully enveloping dankness of the first wave of indie.

★★★★☆

The Smile
A Light for Attracting Attention
XL

LIGHT SHINES Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead, along with drummer Tom Skinner, bring to mind their main gig's rockier, proggier past with this side project, to winning effect.

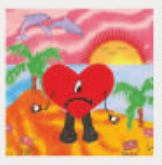
★★★★☆

Becky G
Esquemas
RCA

G FORCE The Mexican American artist's latest is all about claiming her spot as a stand-alone powerhouse as she incorporates reggaeton, dembow, notes of salsa, and balladic pop.

★★★★☆

Bad Bunny
Un Verano Sin Ti
Rimas



BIG BUN The Puerto Rican star delivers a loose, leisurely album that stretches out to 23 songs, with everything from mambo to throwback trap and a strong social and political undercurrent.

★★★½☆

Hank Williams Jr.
Rich White Honky Blues
Easy Eye

HAMMERIN' HANK The country icon hooks up with Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys for a stripped-down blues record. It's rowdy fun, full of good bad jokes and loads of unmistakable Hank swagger.

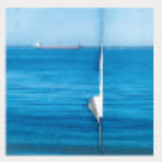
★★★½☆

Belle & Sebastian
A Bit of Previous
Matador

INDIE-POP BLISS The beloved Scottish indie poppers are back with their first album in seven years, and they're still great at delivering wry prettiness like the excellent opener "Young and Stupid."

★★★½☆

Craig Finn
A Legacy of Rentals
Positive Jams



ROCK NOIR Well into his third decade as a songwriter, Finn is still a master of honing a specific kind of Midwestern-hipster disaffection, and his storytelling chops are only getting sharper with age.

★★★½☆

Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever
Endless Rooms
Sub Pop

MODERN JANGLE The third record from these Aussies isn't quite as transportingly charming as their past couple, but they're still first-rate guitar poets, now with a little political edge, too.

★★★☆☆

Vance Joy
In Our Own Sweet Time
Atlantic

TOO MUCH JOY This Aussie folk-pop nice guy celebrates life and love with a warm heart and light touch — a little too light at times, as his well-crafted valentines can dissolve from memory on impact.

★★½☆☆

CONTRIBUTORS: DAVID BROWNE, JON DOLAN, WILL DUKES, KORY GROW, JOSEPH HUDAK, JHONI JACKSON

★★★★★ Classic | ★★★★ Excellent | ★★★ Good | ★★ Fair | ★ Poor RATINGS ARE SUPERVISED BY THE EDITORS OF ROLLING STONE.

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: ERRICH PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES; MARK METCALFE/GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES; XAVI TORRENT/WIREIMAGE; TAYLOR HILL/GETTY IMAGES; MARK HORTON/WIREIMAGE

Photo Credit: Shutterstock, Alexander Wilkerson

The annual weekend of events held at ARRIVE Palm Springs featured the ***Rolling Stone* x Meta Creator House** celebrating music, creators, fashion, tech and more, and culminated on April 16th with **Rolling Stone Live: Palm Springs**. This party under the desert sun showcased incredible performances and DJ sets, featuring brand activations from Origin™ Water, Lovesac, CIROC Vodka, Lucky Brand, Matua Wine, Core Foods, Abra, Reign Energy, Tractor Beverage Co., Candy Pop popcorn along with hospitality partners Resorts World Las Vegas, Zouk Nightlife and Madre Restaurant & Mezcaleria.

Guests such as supermodel Alessandra Ambrosio, Ashley Greene, Patrick Schwarzenegger, Alexis Ren, Hannah Stocking, Darren Barnet, Sarunas Jackson, Keith Powers, Abby Champion, Riverdale's Drew Tanner and Hart Denton, Marta Pozzan, Ashley Smith, Natalie Alyn Lind, Courtney Dietz, Andrew Matarazzo, Kai Caster, Taryn Manning, Dom Zeglaitis, Love Is Blind's Nick Thompson and Danielle Ruille, Emily Tanner, Diamond White, Ashley Haas, Ayrel, Kelsey Caesar, Vanderpump's Scheana and Brock Davies, and many more were seen at the exclusive bash featuring live performances by Grace McKagan, BLXST, Carwash, James Hype and perennial festival headliner Gryffin, along with special guest DJ sets by Denise Love Hewett and Tolula Adeyemi.

Cruise once again finds himself in the cockpit.

Movies

THE NEED FOR SPEED (AND SEQUELS)

Tom Cruise returns to his most famous role, and gives us a flyboy-in-winter who doesn't quite take our breath away

Top Gun: Maverick

STARRING Tom Cruise, Miles Teller, Jennifer Connelly, Ed Harris, Glen Powell, Jon Hamm, Manny Jacinto, Val Kilmer

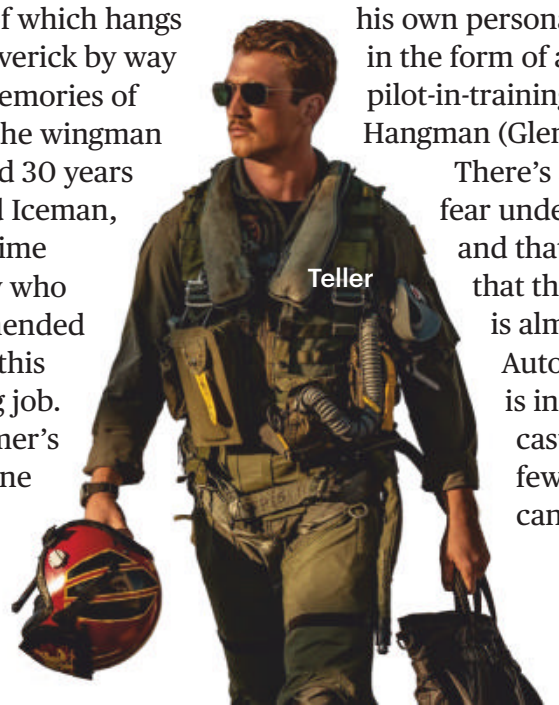
DIRECTED BY Joseph Kosinski

K. AUSTIN COLLINS

ANOTHER DAY, another secret bunker full of uranium to wipe out. At the start of *Top Gun: Maverick,* our man Pete "Maverick" Mitchell (Tom Cruise) is working as a test pilot. He's still a captain: Some 30-plus years into his career, he's advanced . . . very little. His reputation for abandoning protocol in favor of following his own instincts precedes him, even if it means pushing a plane past Mach 10 against all common sense. He's "Maverick" after all.

Director Joseph Kosinski's decades-later sequel catches our hero on the other side of his fearless, reckless youth, with no glory and no family – only a spotty reputation. After an incident with a test plane he's operating results in a fiery ball of shrapnel and a talking-to by the ever-stern Ed Harris, Maverick is assigned to see everything from the other side. Back to Flighttown, USA, he goes. Only now *he's* the teacher.

There's also Penelope (Jennifer Connelly), a new love interest that Maverick has seen and abandoned before. There's that uranium that Maverick's top-shelf pupils must learn to blow up for NATO's sake. And there's the problem of mortality, the harbinger of which hangs over Maverick by way of his memories of Goose, the wingman who died 30 years ago, and Iceman, his onetime frenemy who recommended him for this teaching job. (Val Kilmer's only scene in the movie, a cherry-on-top callback that can't help but feel like a tribute to the ailing actor's iconic career, is more moving than you'd think it would be.)



Teller

One of those students is the son of Goose, a kid who goes by Rooster (Miles Teller), and it's no spoiler to say that he and Maverick have their own history. And because *Top Gun: Maverick* is a movie that follows the blueprint of the original beat-for-beat, Rooster has his own flair for theatrics and flailing shows of confidence. He's a maverick in his own right. And he's got his own personal Iceman, in the form of a fellow pilot-in-training named Hangman (Glen Powell).

There's a baseline fear underlying it all, and that's the fact that the flyboy era is almost over. Automation is in: Fewer casualties, fewer loose cannons. When machines rebel, it terrifies us. When people do it, we cheer – under the right circumstances. What *Top Gun: Maverick* presupposes is that we'd all rather watch a movie about team building, overcoming the odds, and defying our own limits than a treatise on technology – that we'd all rather root for Tom Cruise than a machine. The irony is that the movie goes out of its way to humanize these young men and women to such an extraordinary extent that it only hits that much harder when you realize, as Maverick says very early on, that someone is necessarily going to die.

Of course, it wouldn't be *Top Gun* if it didn't feel like it were playing out in a vacuum, with all of these melodramatic concerns – not least a war that's apparently already going on or is awfully imminent – eclipsing any real examination of what, exactly, we're fighting for. But maybe all of this is what we're fighting for. "The enemy" in *Maverick* is given no national identity. But the planes they're flying look awfully like Russian Su-57s. The toy merchandise still calls these stealth fighters "Enemy Strike Jets," but no one's fooled here, and we aren't really meant to be.

It's always been curious that *Top Gun* – a movie about American might and mastery, about preparing fighters for war – could feel like it was playing out in such an alt-universe that training missions and the actual mission blend together in the viewer's mind. In *Maverick*, the mission makes for the most exciting moment, even as it feels deliriously strange. *Maverick* is for the most part a sturdy, modernized gloss on the original, powered once again by a megawatt Cruise and a crew of more-than-capable supporting players. When it goes its own way, it tends to lose itself – as when that last mission offers up a blindside and an extra leg of action, a bit of syrupy character building by way of rapid-firing machines and an old junk plane. Enemies have a curious way of disappearing, then popping up whenever it's convenient, as if this were all just a simulation. But as hero-cosplay for Cruise, a simulation was all this sequel was ever meant to be. ®

FROM TOP: PARAMOUNT PICTURES; SCOTT GARFIELD/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

LONG LIVE THE NEWER FLESH!

David Cronenberg's first film in eight years is a return to bloody, gristly body-horror form By DAVID FEAR

Crimes of the Future

STARRING Viggo Mortensen, Léa Seydoux, Kristen Stewart, Scott Speedman

DIRECTED BY David Cronenberg

A MAN LIES sleeping in his bed, tossing and turning. Well, "bed" doesn't quite describe it: more like an organic cocoon cleaved in half, suspended from the ceiling by stringy, sinewy tentacles. The gent squirming around inside this pituitary-gland-like pod is haggard but handsome, silver-maned, eyebrowless; if it weren't for the matinee-idol jawline, you almost wouldn't recognize that it's Viggo Mortensen. "I think the bed needs new software," he croaks to his female companion, who's adjusting rubbery extensions feeding into his hands. "It's not anticipating my pain anymore."

You may have no idea what is going on, but trust us – you know exactly where you're at. It is less than five minutes into a movie "written and directed by David Cronenberg." The fact they even had to put that credit onscreen at all feels like a mere formality.

Crimes of the Future isn't just the first film in eight years from Canada's favorite cinematic son – it's a return to the type of gooey, gristly genre-melt that made Cronenberg both a midnight-movie icon and an international sensation. And judging from the way this waking sci-fi nightmare doubles down on the difficulty factor, he's also trying to make up for a lot of lost time in one fell swoop. Borrowing the title from his sophomore feature – a 1970 experimental film that offered a peek at the shape of things to come – it's neither a remake nor a sequel to that earlier work. But it definitely suggests a full-circle notion of Cronenberg once again digging around in his roots and seeing what he can extract from the fertile muck.

Mortensen's Saul Tenzer is a big deal in what's now an extremely popular pastime: performance-art mutilation. He's renowned for growing his own oddball internal organs, which he and his lover, Caprice (Léa Seydoux), extract live for an adoring public. "Surgery is the new sex!" exclaims Timlin – played by Kristen Stewart – an employee at the National Organ Registry who wants to join the act. (When she tries to seduce this postmodern superstar, he demurs, "I'm not so great at the old sex.")

There's also a twitchy guy named Lang (Scott Speedman), armed with a proposition for Saul and Caprice. He wants them to perform a live autopsy on his dead son. If they do that, they run the risk of angering the "New Vice" cops and becoming outlaws. But they might also help move forward Lang's mysterious agenda.

That's the noirish engine thrumming beneath *Crimes*' slick, viscous surface, and if you listen hard enough – or, as one supporting player in the movie does, literally cover your body with ears – you can detect the faint rumblings of an eco-thriller and a satirical swipe at today's celebrity-industrial complex.

Yet abandon all hope, ye who grasp for a plotline to hold on to here. The conversion of new cult members is not on the menu. No, this is one for the Cronen-heads, a dense treatise aimed at those who already treat his more outré, boundary-obliterating works as gospel. It's an opportunity to get Seydoux to purr lines like "An organism needs organization . . . otherwise, it's just designer cancer." It's an excuse to have Mortensen fed like a baby in a "chair" made of janky, swaying bones.

Crimes of the Future is proof that some artists can keep finding fresh meat within decades-old preoccupations. This is what the work of a visionary filmmaker looks like. Forget the new flesh. Long live the old Cronenberg. ®

ORGAN GRINDER Above: Mortensen and Seydoux have an intimate moment between performance-art surgeries. Left: Stewart and Seydoux are rivals over a romantic partner and body parts.

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: AVCO EMBASSY/EVERETT COLLECTION; NIKOS NIKOLOPOULOS/NEON PICTURES; UNIVERSAL PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION; NIKOS NIKOLOPOULOS/NEON PICTURES; 20TH CENTURY FOX FILM CORP./EVERETT COLLECTION; NEW LINE CINEMA/EVERETT COLLECTION

ESSENTIAL CRONENBERG

The Modern Master of Bloody Terror

Cronenberg's films are some of the weirdest, goriest, and most provocative ever made. These four are required viewing

SCANNERS

1981

After spending the 1970s refining his unique vision of body horror, Cronenberg began the 1980s with this whip-smart sci-fi action movie about warring armies of psychics turning Montreal into a — battleground. Come for the exploding head — one of the greatest, bloodiest special effects of all time — stay for a conspiracy thriller that takes on power, corruption, and corporate lies.

VIDEODROME

1983

The strongest example of Cronenberg's ideas about technology, body horror, media, and the metastasizing mindset of the modern era, this story of a sleazy TV executive (James Woods) who discovers a mysterious contraband cable station and experiences physical transformations is his masterpiece. The handgun coming of out the TV screen may be its most haunting image. The videotape going into Woods' torso is a close second.

THE FLY

1986

Cronenberg's mainstream breakthrough gives the 1958 camp-horror classic one goopy makeover. Jeff Goldblum's scientist, Seth Brundle, tests out his teleportation machine

with an unexpected companion in tow, and *voila!* Meet "BrundleFly," a perfect mix of household pest and tragic hero. The fact that it doubles as a *Beauty and the Beast* riff also makes it the director's most romantic movie to date.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

2005

Viggo Mortensen is a mild-mannered diner owner in Small Town, USA. Then someone notices he resembles a notorious Mob killer from Philly, and what's that saying about the past never really being past? This graphic-novel adaptation was an uncharacteristically straight turn for Cronenberg, though he still brought a splatter-flick approach to the violence. An instant classic.

NEO-NAZI SATANIST

[*Cont. from 43*] began to feature more graphic images of torture, and Charles Manson became central to the aesthetic. However, the introduction of satanic beliefs and texts caused dissent, particularly among Atomwaffen members with more traditional National Socialist or Christian-identity views. "As the occult and the Manson gimmick started to be pushed more and more, a lot of those new people dropped out because that was a bit much for even them to handle," says the former member.

Sutter's work for the FBI was substantial and underpinned the early 2020 indictments that decimated the Atomwaffen Division. While Denton and several others pleaded out, Cole pleaded not guilty to conspiracy charges over doxxing several reporters and went to trial. Last August, Cole's lawyers filed a bombshell motion to suppress evidence from the search of the Atomwaffen house in Conroe on the basis that Sutter was a snitch for the FBI – and had been since 2004. "The CI is a convicted felon and currently owns and operates a publishing company that distributes white-supremacist writings," reads the Aug. 13, 2021, motion by Cole's attorneys. "The CI began his long career as a professional informant in exchange for consideration regarding his sentence on a federal conviction for possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number and an unregistered silencer. He has continued this work for pay."

Despite the allegations about working with law enforcement, Sutter maintained cachet within the extreme right wing, in large part because Tempel ov Blood and Martinet Press produced graphic, ultraviolent literature popular with the extremist crowd.

However, the 2021 allegations about Sutter had substance: Cole's defense attorneys based their presentation on discovery materials disclosed by prosecutors in Seattle. Moreover, the government lawyers admitted that Sutter was on their books and vouched for his reliability: "The fact that the FBI repeatedly chose to pay the informant for information over many years is a reflection of the fact that the FBI consistently found the informant's information proved reliable," Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Woods wrote in a filing last August.

While the gambit to get the evidence against Cole tossed failed, and he was sentenced to seven years' incarceration (including prior time served) after a jury convicted him in January, it revealed a huge problem for the FBI. In his court testimony, Sutter gave his occupation as "publisher," referring to Martinet Press, his occult-book imprint.

The FBI declined to respond to questions from ROLLING STONE about Sutter's role as a paid informant, Martinet Press' role in spreading O9A ideology, or whether it had been contacted by foreign law enforcement regarding either Sutter or the Tempel ov Blood. Sutter's primary handler, Special Agent Moser, also did not return requests for comment.

FBI snitches have long come under scrutiny for committing crimes while working as government informants, most notably Whitey Bulger and Stephen Flemmi, Boston gangsters who committed more than a dozen murders while on the federal payroll. Roy Frankhouser, a longtime neo-Nazi and fixture on the far right, signed on as an FBI informant to feed the bureau information on Black nationalists and left-wing militants in the 1970s. Mike German, a former FBI agent who spent years infiltrating white-supremacist movements in the 1990s, points to Bulger's case and Sutter's years of satanist proselytizing as exemplars of "gross mismanagement" by the country's premier law-enforcement agency. "The confidential informant has been mismanaged for decades – that's a very fraught enterprise, the idea that you're going to go out and find people with firsthand knowledge of criminal activity and to the extent they're cooperating with you, it's because they're betraying their colleagues," German tells ROLLING STONE. "Where the FBI gets in trouble all the time is ignoring the crimes the informants are committing."

German notes the FBI's relationship with Proud Boy leader Enrique Tarrio, currently facing federal charges in connection with the Jan. 6 insurrection (he has pleaded not guilty), as well as right-wing radio host Hal Turner in the early 2000s, another propagandist like Sutter whose role as a paid informant emerged during a federal trial. "Originally, they must've thought signing up a propagandist who agreed not to engage in criminal activity was appealing," German says of the FBI's rationale for employing Sutter. Bureau rules bar agents from retaining informants who engage in violent crimes, and propagandists often network among like-minded extremists while not getting their hands dirty. However, German noted that the same attributes can be dangerous: "To the extent that this guy is sending this ideology into the ether for everyone to absorb – how many others are following through and acting on it?"

DURING THE course of April and May 2020, Pvt. Melzer's alleged plans to frag his own unit continued to evolve. He split off from the main RapeWaffen channel and formed a separate, smaller group labeled "Op Hardrock" with several alleged co-conspirators – the administrator of the RapeWaffen Division channel, who claimed to be an ex-Canadian paratrooper but was, according to filings by Melzer's defense attorneys, in reality a teenager with severe mental-health problems; another person who claimed to be a Turkish national affiliated with the ultranationalist Grey Wolves organization; and an American who posed as an O9A adherent while in truth reporting back to the FBI.

In court filings, federal prosecutors allege that in late May 2020, Melzer and the FBI source discussed the planned attack. "What makes you think that you can actually get away with fucking with the U.S. military," the informant asked. Melzer stated he maintained a neutral, normie presence within his unit and that there was enough Islamic-militant activity in the region to provide logical cover for any potential attack he might be involved in. The source also asked Melzer why he'd deleted messages from their earlier chats.

"You deleted them because that's treason," the FBI source said.

"Kek," Melzer replied, using an old gamer term for "Lol" that the alt-right adopted.

For his part, Joshua Sutter has faced no consequences for his role in spreading Order of Nine Angles dogma. Martinet Press continues to publish and distribute books, and its website remains up and running. However, his reputation is badly damaged in many far-right circles. The Atomwaffen Division's remnants have written a number of self-absolving screeds against him and what they perceive as FBI entrapment. Sutter also never paid taxes on the $140,000 he earned as an informant, or the $4,378.60 in travel expenses given to him by the FBI. Satanists apparently don't care much for the Internal Revenue Service.

BLACKPINK

[*Cont. from 53*] istically swaggering rap (the video has more than 800 million views on YouTube). "I have so many things I like . . . I love vocals, rap, dance. I can contain all of that in a single song. I have that diversity."

Fun or not, making music is full of pressure, as the foursome recall during a break from the photo shoot. "The most fun is before we start making it," Jisoo says with a laugh.

"Or when it's in the past," says Jennie, giggling.

"When I recorded something for the first time," Rosé says, "I was so excited. I didn't know any better, so it was fun. I envy that now. Now, no matter how hard I try, a part of me is never satisfied."

"That's an occupational disease," Lisa tells Rosé. "And I feel exactly the same."

Jisoo loves creating, loves building a song from scratch with an expert team. But she sometimes struggles with questions of purpose and the pressures of fame. "What do I exactly like?" she asks. "It's still a mystery. I love to perform, but I don't always enjoy being part of the spotlight. I think it's different for the other members: They love to receive the spotlight, feeling energized by the people who come to see us, and then getting a bit depressed when the stage is over and silence arrives. I'm a little different. When I'm onstage, I think about not making mistakes. Performing sometimes feels more like a test than something genuinely fun."

Lisa talks about a period of fighting with her own voice. "That whole year between 'As If It's Your Last' [2017] and 'Ddu-du Ddu-du' [2018] was rough for me," she says, sitting in a dimly lit recording studio on a basement floor of YG. "I couldn't sing. When I went to the studio to record, nothing came out. I cried. I felt like I was bringing the team down. Teddy pushed me hard: 'You can't? No. Try harder. Go back in there.' Because of Teddy, I overcame that time."

Jennie regularly does Pilates, yoga, boxing, and other exercises to stay healthy. "For me, so far, when I'm good in my body, I feel happier and healthier in my mental health. . . . And have good people around you that you can trust," she adds. "And pets."

Now, Blackpink are revving up to launch new music – to unleash more bangers, to further cement their place as one of greatest girl groups of all time – with no end in sight. "I mean, won't Blackpink last at least 10 more years? We'll be nearly 40 by then," Lisa says. "Someday we'll get married and things like that. But then I see the Spice Girls, how they got together for a reunion concert. Can we do that too someday? Will I be able to dance then, like I do now?" Then she laughs in her characteristically hearty way.

"Even if we're 70 and we have different lives, I'll still feel like I'm Blackpink," says Jennie. "As corny as it sounds, I don't think Blackpink will ever end in my heart. It's a part of my family. You can't deny your family."

Last year, Rosé released her first solo single, "On the Ground." I ask what the lyric "Everything I need is on the ground" means to her. She pauses. Her shoulder-length blond hair wisps around her face as her eyes narrow into focus. "Just us as people. A year and a half ago, maybe two, I remember us eating. It was the four of us and Teddy. We were just hungry people – we got to the restaurant, very hungry, and the food was really good. This is what makes us feel like people. Just us, eating with the people we love."

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[*Cont. from 31*] – who'd sunk his protégé by calling a witness to testify that the mogul had never in fact fired his weapon at all; only Shyne had. Lopez never took the stand, and Combs was cleared of all charges.

Today, Shyne doesn't have much to say about the shooting, other than that he paid "a heavy debt – some would say an unreasonable debt – for something I didn't even do." He kept quiet about the case throughout his time at the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York, earning him yet more street cred. "I took the fall for my friends," he says, repeating a line he's no doubt told many before me. "But that's the way life is."

Combs rebranded himself P. Diddy after his trial and released the single "Bad Boys for Life." ("It's official," he rapped. "I survived what I been through.") But Shyne had had enough of his mentor. He broke his contract with Bad Boy and signed a $3 million deal with Def Jam. In 2004, he released *Godfather Buried Alive,* 12 of whose 13 tracks were recorded before his prison term began (he rapped "For the Record," a 50 Cent diss track, down a crackling prison phone line). It took shots at Rudy Giuliani, George W. Bush, the War on Drugs – and Combs: "See through niggas take they time like a man/We don't snitch we don't sing on the stand."

The warden had to limit media visits, such was the clamor for hip-hop's headline criminal. But Shyne had other ideas. He studied Judaism, the religion of his great-grandmother, a descendant of the Beta Israel, Ethiopian Jews. He fasted and kept Shabbat, refusing visitors between Friday and Saturday nights.

"I wasn't seeking anything," he says, when I ask whether religion was a way to pass the years inside. "I practiced sciences. I was a wizard. I fasted for six months of the year, sunup to sundown. I would only eat at night and early in the morning." Just as he had done after being shot, Shyne turned to God. He changed his name to Moses Levi and kept kosher.

"I always had certitude," he adds. "But when I found the science of Judaism, it worked. Every day, someone would try to kill me. And by God's grace I never got a touch." One day while playing basketball in the prison yard, Shyne dunked on a sex offender. "Guy must have been like six feet six, he was a monster," he recalls. "Then he threw the ball at me, and I just struck him."

The next thing Shyne remembers was waking up on the asphalt with nothing but a sprained foot. "He could've killed me," he says. "I could've dropped the wrong way, he could've taken a weight and bashed me." It was divine intervention, Shyne concluded: another reward for knuckling down.

In 2009, authorities released Shyne on parole, and he signed another deal with Def Jam. But he was undocumented, and four weeks later, customs officers deported him to Belize. As a convicted felon, they would not allow him back into the U.S.

Fortunately for him, Shyne was now Belizean royalty. The previous year, Dean Barrow had become the country's leader, and his brother had represented Mesop since 1993. Father and son patched up their relationship, and Shyne was appointed a "music ambassador" to Belize, telling an *XXL* reporter he wanted it to become a "Central American Dubai."

But his dreams of creating a music mecca went largely unrealized. First, he ended up racking up a huge, unpaid bill at one of Belize City's most exclusive penthouses. Then, in 2011, he organized a concert at one of the city's soccer fields, partly to promote the upcoming release of a new single, "Messiah," promising to perform alongside Barrington Levy, local artists, and at least two of Def Jam's acts. But neither Levy nor the Def Jam artists showed.

Amid the controversies, Shyne left Belize for Jerusalem to embrace ultra-religious life. He grew *payot* (sidecurls), wore a fedora and Ray-Bans, and underwent an informal conversion called *giyur lechmura*. Soon he was leading a clique of music-loving Hasids, barely touching alcohol, and studying Talmud between jam sessions. "I never saw the guy sleep for more than an hour," says Yosef "Big J" ben Shimon, a rapper who fell into Shyne's orbit. "He would fall asleep with a book in his hand almost every night."

Shyne still wanted to be a rap superstar, and performed with Matisyahu and others in Israel. But prison had damaged his voice, and meetings with hard-partying Def Jam execs were tough to reconcile with orthodoxy. "The conversion process he was getting into required a lot of commitment, and the gangster stuff didn't really blend with that," says Eli Goldsmith, a husky, London-born club promoter who became one of Shyne's closest confidants.

A self-released 2012 mixtape, *Gangland,* explored religious, political, and racial themes. But it bombed, and Shyne was growing disillusioned with prejudices closer to his new home. Since Ethiopian Jews began making aliyah in the mid-Seventies, they have faced continued discrimination. Wearing a white scarf on the Sabbath, while unmarried, was enough for Shyne to elicit the ire of lighter-skinned worshippers.

"I met so many religious people who judged me, and who were prejudiced and discriminatory," he says. "Everything that you should never be as a chosen person. Whose emissary are you? What God is that? That's not what God is. God created everybody.

"I realized: It's not about the outfit I have on, it's not about the payot or the black hat, or not driving on Shabbat," he adds. "What it's about is being honest, compassionate, tolerant, kind and generous and altruistic. . . . I don't need a rabbi to tell me I'm kosher."

In 2012, Shyne moved to Paris, and transitioned back to secular life. At Paris Fashion Week, Combs offered him an apology, and the two made peace, posing for photos in the front row. "Let's celebrate this moment as a historical event and a victory for hip-hop and Afro and Latin American men trained to exterminate each other," Shyne told *XXL*. "It's a new day. *L'chaim*!"

Still, Shyne found that life felt empty. "I realized I was just in Paris enjoying myself," he says. "There was really no purpose." He also found himself way down rap's food chain. When old pals like Jay-Z or Drake passed through town, he would hang with them. But nobody asked him for a rhyme or a collab. When a close friend told Shyne it was time to hang up the mic, "I was upset, I was insulted," he recalls. "But it was the greatest advice anyone ever gave me." Shyne left Paris in 2013, and returned to Belize.

THE AFTERNOON after my first talk with Shyne, I'm invited by a local youth leader to a gathering of around 40 young men in a straw-roofed cabana beside a Belize City resort. Outside, American spring breakers drink and dance to a soundtrack of Drake, DJ Khaled, and Lil Wayne.

Inside, the mood is far less celebratory. Five shootings have hit Belize City in the past 24 hours. Cops with semi-automatic weapons guard the exits, and community leaders attempt to parlay a ceasefire. Before long, folks are on their feet hurling accusations

at one another. Only the threat of a "state of emergency" – during which cops throw anybody with suspected gang ties into jail – puts them back on their seats.

"The gangs in Belize are disorganized," a pastor tells me an hour later, as everybody files out into the afternoon sun. It's "sprots, trying to fight off competition." Joblessness is high, and people are desperate. The only solutions are political. "Education, family: These are the things that will change the dynamic."

Neither Shyne nor any of his parliamentary colleagues attend the meeting. For our second interview, he invites me not to Mesopotamia, where I might see him interact with his constituents, but to the porch of an upscale whiskey bar straight from the pages of a Graham Greene novel. He orders barracuda and truffle fries, and starts by blaming Belize's police minister (who refused an interview for this story) for the city's ongoing violence. "You have many years and years of a judicial system that is extremely weak," Shyne says, "and has failed the nation."

How can somebody who promotes his refusal to snitch after the Club New York shooting be a good role model to kids in his constituency, I ask him. "Certainly younger Shyne was anti-government, against the police," he admits. "The authorities, as a kid growing up, were very oppressive." Back then it was "accepting the blame, taking the fall, and not getting other people in trouble. That's the context of me not snitching. It's not like I was terrorizing my community." But in Belize, he clarifies, snitching is "a by-product of the greater issue, which is the mindset that says, 'It's OK to kill people, it's OK to rob people, it's OK to terrorize my community.'"

Leaders need to "put the people first, not the oligarchs," he says. But surely he's an oligarch himself? When he returned to Belize from Paris, Shyne cleaved to his father. In 2020, he won Mesop. In 2025, he hopes to unseat Briceño and follow in his father's footsteps to become Belize's prime minister.

On both Combs and his father – the relationships that have defined him more than any others in his careers in music and politics – Shyne reduces the complicated dynamics to media-friendly aphorisms. Now he understands why his father rejected him as a child, he tells me, "because he was a single guy, having a child with him while he's trying to be the best public servant he can be." Of Combs, he says simply, he's still a "close friend. There's no problem with that relationship, and I'm grateful for it."

In 2020, he explained in an interview that he'd reconciled Combs' choices in the aftermath of the shooting as those of a man who was "a half-a-billion-dollar corporation. So, nobody is going to sacrifice the corporation for anybody else." He clearly took the lesson to heart. "Being disciplined is one of the great things I learned from Diddy," he says today. "Being the leader of a country is not that different from being the CEO of a corporation. You gotta take care of all the employees, and you gotta ensure that the business performs. You gotta lead, you gotta set the tone, and you gotta be there thinking for everyone. I've been training for this my entire life because I grew up with one of the greatest CEOs ever in Diddy."

Beyond Combs, music still plays a big role in Shyne's political image. In recent years he's brought industry heavyweights like Combs, Kanye West, and J. Prince to Belize, though he claims none of those invitations was calculated. "Fat Joe, DJ Khaled, Jay-Z, Steven Victor, Kanye West – these are all people I've been friends with my entire career," he says. "It's not as if I picked and chose who I'm friends with. It's a part of who I am, promoting Belize and wanting to make Belize an international treasure." In 2021, Universal signed five Belizean artists with Shyne's help. "You can't pay for that PR," he says.

Whether that translates into tangible results for the citizens of Belize remains to be seen. "I think him'll lift up the whole of Mesop and the country," dancehall performer 6Frass says. "He got a lot of backup; I know he can do it for us long as he pushes."

People here are confused about Shyne. I am too. He's charismatic, but at arm's distance. Professional, but a chimera. I wondered why Shyne hadn't invited me to join him in Mesop. Perhaps he wanted to show a white, Western journalist the upmarket side to Belize City – to drum up the tourism he claims his star quality adds to the country. As I walk around Mesop the following night, a local gangster sees it differently. "When he brings Puff Daddy over here, he doesn't bring him to the ghetto, he brings him to the cayes," he tells me. "He don't wanna show him no ghetto. He'd have to admit that his daddy had 13 years and he's done nothing. The whole system's junk."

Night sucks the color out of Mesop, leaving patches of dim yellow-streetlamp light on streets that have narrowed in the darkness. Cop cars creep up and down its tight alleys, stopping to move on groups of young men guarding their turf. A convenience-store owner who's lived in the neighborhood for decades tells me it doesn't matter who gets voted into power. Once they get power, you rarely see them again: "You see the Belize flag? Two colors: red and blue. PUP, UDP. These guys are the biggest Bloods and Crips."

I close out the night at a club a block from the beach, with a local journalist and a notorious drug dealer, sipping whiskeys. "We know pretty much the man's a sellout – we don't disrespect him for that," the drug dealer says of Shyne. "You don't have to pretend you got no Rolex." When I ask him if Shyne is the answer to Belize's problems, he laughs. "Man," he says, knocking back his drink. "He's bullshit."

"He's one of the same oligarchs that he claims to want to remove from power," my other companion adds. "There's a handful of families in Belize who control all the wealth, the land, the resources, and access to the government. He's enjoying a free ride to the top because people are so indifferent to politics."

Some Belizeans question whether somebody who fled to the Middle East just months after his deportation really wants to stay the course in tiny Belize – or if it's just another chapter in the story of Shyne. More than a few folks told me they think his entire political career is a ploy to use his diplomatic status to return to the United States. At this idea, Shyne bristles. "I made it back because of my service to Belize," he says. "Thank God that I'm in a position where I can try and do my best for my country."

Despite my own misgivings about his selflessness, there's no doubt he's going to play a big role in his country's future. Since 2017, he has been married to a businesswoman named Catherine, and a year after that they had a daughter. He's going nowhere. Whether that's good for Belize's mounting gang problems is another question. But he still has that same conviction that hit him back in 1996, when he realized he could be a rap star. "My creativity is channeled into finding solutions for people I've been elected to serve," he says. "Not just people in Mesopotamia, but people all throughout the country. What I believe I'm on this Earth to do is find solutions for the problems of humanity. As a creative, that's what you do: You create." ®

Additional reporting by Danny Gold

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Joan Jett

The rock legend on aging gracefully and owning her bad reputation

Your new album, *Changeup,* includes an acoustic remake of "Bad Reputation." Why do you think that song still resonates with people all these years later?
Everyone feels maybe they've got a bad reputation in one area of their life or another, or maybe [have been] unfairly accused – or just a misconception of who you are, and people throw that label at you. I always wore it as a badge of honor, because what people were saying to me was I had a bad reputation because I played an electric guitar and I had black hair and a leather jacket, and maybe I swore. . . . So I turned around the meaning of it, and I'm proud of my bad reputation, if that's what it is – making people uncomfortable because you're not used to seeing women do this or that. But it's not just music. It's every walk of life. When I speak to women and girls pursuing their dreams . . . there's that hard glass ceiling. It's still there. But we have good PR, so we feel like we've come farther than we really have.

Jett and the Heartbreakers are on tour with Mötley Crüe this summer.

Your tourmates this summer, Mötley Crüe and Poison, have sometimes been accused of misogyny in the past. As a woman, does that faze you at all?
It's very prevalent, all over rock & roll. Look, all I can do as the woman I am is go out there and show an alternative view and do it my way. If I had to weed out every band you thought was problematic, I mean, there wouldn't be very many left. And I think everyone's being a little. . . . Chill out, it's music.

Overall, do you think rock is less misogynistic now than it was in the Eighties?
That's a good question. The bands I listened to weren't necessarily at all misogynistic, but I'm talking about guys like Fugazi. I would say [it's] probably not as misogynistic [now], just because of their openness to getting criticized about it, because you get creamed online and people seem to care about that. That doesn't mean that it changes who they are, so maybe that's dangerous. It goes underground. But I think things are changing.

What advice do you wish you could give your younger self?
To try to control my emotions a little bit better. When I was younger, [I was] very emotional, in a sense that I would take great offense to people talking about "Girls can't play rock," whatever it was. I was quick to anger, and so I would just try to be a lot more patient. And I've never been one to read my own press, because I figured if you believe the good stuff, you got to believe the bad stuff, too. You're only going to find misery. . . . I would definitely encourage people not to do that – not to Google yourself.

We're speaking shortly after Taylor Hawkins' death, and you've also dealt with the loss of a drummer, Sandy West of the Runaways. Is that still difficult?
Totally, but with Sandy I wasn't actively working with her at the time. But, yes, it's really fucking painful. . . . I just hope all those badass drummers up there are doing some serious soloing.

You entered the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame back in 2015. This year, Dolly Parton initially tried to withdraw her nomination. Do you see her as a rock star?
I mean, they use the phrase to pretty much describe anybody who's big and famous, and has a following like Dolly. But Dolly has influenced rock & rollers. So on that level, I think she absolutely deserves to be there. But I understand what she's saying. She doesn't feel like a rock & roller, and it feels weird to her.

Yeah. I feel like it might be time to change the Rock Hall's name.
Yeah. But people like the word "rock & roll." That's the problem, because it gives a little edge.

Did you fill out your ballot already?
I did.

Did you vote for Dolly?
What do you think?

That's a very Joan Jett answer.
It is. I'm not going to say.

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